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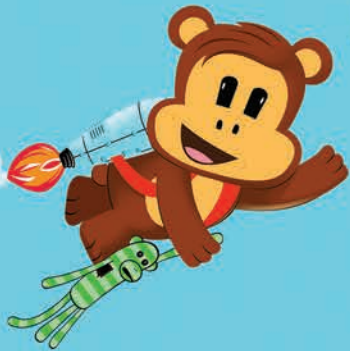


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Cover Our editorial cover features an image from Home Plate Entertainment and Guru Animation Studio's new preschool series *Wish Come True*, while international and event copies sport an ad for interactive boys action series *Invizimals* from BRB Internacional/Screen 21 and Sony Entertainment.

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Number crunched

I received some amazing news last week. No, I didn't win the lottery or a trip of a lifetime, but it almost feels as though I did. You see, thanks to scrappy showrunner Rob Thomas and a well-publicized Kickstarter campaign, *Veronica Mars the Movie* will finally see the light of day. For those of you who haven't seen it, *Veronica Mars* was the smart and snappy teen-meets-film-noir drama I never knew I wanted or needed in my life until it aired, and missed very badly when it was gone. It was very abruptly cancelled in its third season, which left devoted fans (like me) hanging. That the Kickstarter campaign met its stated US\$2-million goal in less than a day proved I wasn't alone. It was really a win for the democratic process in content production—fans voted with their hard-earned dollars and got their beloved *Veronica* back.



And tapping into the pulse of viewers' opinions and desires is only becoming easier as unprecedented numbers of consumers continue to flock to the internet to watch what they want when they want. So while that's enabled something like the resurrection of *Veronica Mars*, it's also creating a whole new original production model. It hasn't trickled very far down into kids content, but it's about to. Yep, we're talking about the mining of Big Data, which Netflix has proudly proclaimed led to the production of its first original series, *House of Cards*. Netflix knows when, what and how much its 33 million subscribers around the world watch. From the numbers generated around viewing patterns, the SVOD service was able to predict that a political drama, directed by David Fincher and starring Kevin Spacey (who are popular with Netflix users), would be a hit. After its debut in February, the series was the most-streamed piece of content on the service, in effect proving the number-crunchers right.

Similarly, you can expect internet giant Amazon, and its production arm Amazon Studios, to start relying on the numbers heavily as it looks to turn its TV pilots (six kids concepts, six adult-skewing shows) into full series. It intends to put those pilots online and invite viewer feedback and voting. The results of that feedback will be used to determine what gets made and how those series evolve.

Certainly, the arrival of alternatives to the handful of broadcast and cable networks—kids and otherwise—capable of commissioning content is welcome, especially to the indie production community. More new shows will get made, and the fate of many will no longer lie in the hands of the mercurial few. My reservation, however, is that relying on data mining to mitigate investment risk and determine what “the people” want to watch might just lead to the production of a lot of what “the people” have already seen. In other words, Big Data really only tells you what viewers have liked before, not what they'll like in the future. Adhering to the dictates of Big Data runs the chance of eliminating the production of shows built around those amazing out-of-left-field ideas and characters that push the boundaries and further expand our worldview—something numbers could never predict. Where in that system would there be room for that renegade creator to tell us a story we didn't even know we wanted to hear? Would there be room for the likes of groundbreakers like Jim Henson or Walt Disney? Sigh, maybe I should pick up a Magic 8 Ball right now.

Cheers,
Lana

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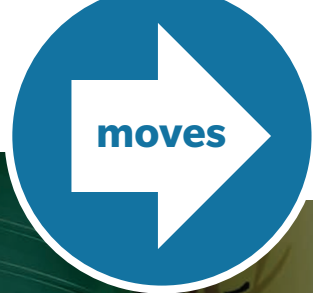
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The List

Five things on our radar this month

1 Big Brother meets Big Data

When Netflix announced its new partnership with DreamWorks Animation for the streaming service's first original kids series, *Turbo: F.A.S.T.* (Fast Action Stunt Team), DreamWorks Animation CEO Jeffrey Katzenberg said the new alliance was "part of the television revolution." It's a revolution that really started in February with the launch of drama series *House of Cards*, Netflix's first original production, which it predicted would be a hit based on the analysis of Big Data. According to GigaOm, Netflix collects about 30 million "plays" per day, including the time viewers pause, rewind and fast-forward content. What that means is you can expect more original productions being created along the lines of *House of Cards*. Although Netflix claims it doesn't get involved on the creative side, it's impossible not to wonder how the creative process will be affected if writers and directors start from a baseline where they know everything kids like, down to how many jump cuts and level of color saturation they prefer. It seems like a picture may now be worth 1,000 numbers.



2 Google starts shipping?

Is Google taking on Amazon in the high stakes game of same-day online shopping? The tech giant has started testing a same-day delivery service called Google Shopping Express. While the service is still in development, Google plans to connect shoppers with local retailers and then employ third-party same-day courier services. Amazon.com currently offers a two-day shipping option for an annual subscription fee of US\$79. Walmart, it's your move now.



3 Marvel powers up digital

And the comic nerds rejoiced. Marvel was busy at SXSW last month. Not only did it launch a new weekly Infinite Comics digital format, it also debuted a new online original video offering. It includes a weekly Marvel-themed pop culture news show and is designed to offer more on-demand content featuring behind-the-scenes clips, reality programming, news and documentaries. Could there be a whole new digital channel in the works? Only the Mouse knows.




4 Nested within mobile

Rovio Entertainment is stepping up Angry Birds' reach with a video channel that will air the animated series *Angry Birds Toons* within its mobile game titles. The series is also going to VOD channel providers, Smart TVs and TV networks. The Rovio games alone have reached more than 1.7 billion downloads. That could translate to a whole lot of eyeballs—and raised eyebrows—in TV land.



5 Math is the word

We're seeing a pattern here. New math-based series are being introduced by broadcasters like PBS (*Peg + Cat*) and digital producers like Amazon Studios, which just ordered a pilot for *Sara Solves It*. Plus, PBS Kids launched a multiplatform effort that supports early math skill development. With math skills in tow, perhaps kids will soon be creating high-tech products and not just playing with them.

 To keep up with the news as it happens, check out Kidscreen.com daily.



You could say something funny happened on the way to med school to Brooklyn-born **Joe D'Ambrosia**, or at least something entertaining. Following his true passion, he chose the stage over the operating theater and the rest is history.



Sofia the First is the latest hit to emerge from Disney Junior's original program pipeline

Achieving greatness in an unexpected career

The gig As VP of original programming at Disney Junior, D'Ambrosia oversees production and development of the US channel and global brand's programming slate that currently includes hit series like *Jake and the Never Land Pirates*, *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse* and the popular new TV movie and series *Sofia the First*.

Born to run Growing up in Springsteen country (Freehold, New Jersey) in a large, Italian-American family, D'Ambrosia had dreamed of working in the entertainment business, but had it not been for a surprise visit from his father during his first month at Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, he might have become a doctor. "When I enrolled in college, I was planning on going pre-med," D'Ambrosia recalls. The day his dad arrived to have a "talk" while enjoying a meal at an expensive steakhouse, D'Ambrosia's father divulged that he would fully support his son if he wanted to change his major. "I nearly choked on a spare rib," says D'Ambrosia. "The next day I switched over to theater and it was one of the happiest days of my life."

Becoming creative On his road to Disney, D'Ambrosia endured many bad jobs early on, including a stint selling tickets to the world premiere of *Les Misérables* at Washington's Kennedy Center. "It was like being on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, except you worked with people who were very dramatic and slightly depressed out-of-work actors," he says. "I'm glad I'm not doing that anymore, but it really taught me that I needed to be more directly involved in the creative process."

After moving away from acting, but sticking with entertainment, D'Ambrosia kicked off his career at Nickelodeon by launching its family film division in 1994—not a surprising move considering his love of classic family TV shows including *I Love Lucy*, *The Brady Bunch* and *The Partridge Family*. He contends he never imagined ending up in kids programming, but D'Ambrosia

was able to draw on his acting experience to make the transition. "Acting really taught me how to listen and that is one of my most cherished skills working as a creative executive."

Career trajectory During his time as director of development for Nickelodeon Movies, D'Ambrosia worked on many popular family films including *Rugrats: The Movie* and *Snow Day*. However, he survived his first big career challenge serving as a creative exec on Nick's first live-action feature and his first film, *Harriet the Spy*. "On my first day, I pitched a writer who had been dead for 20 years. I was completely mortified," he says. "But I eventually started asking questions.

I may have looked unseasoned from time to time, but I never came across as a fool again." He also says advice from former Nick president Herb Scannell helped him get through his first years in L.A. "The one thing he said to me that I'll always remember is, 'You make your own reputation. People never remember you for the projects you worked on, but they'll remember how you treated them.'"

In the groove After spending nearly two years at Sony Pictures Entertainment and running his own company Murray Hill 5 Productions for close to 10 years, D'Ambrosia says he's now having "the time of his life" at Disney Junior. "It's the best job—I am privileged to work with Nancy Kanter. I watch her display her leadership qualities in spades every day and I continue to learn so much from that." —Jeremy Dickson

Out of Office

Tales from the frequent fliers club



David Levine

VP and GM,
Disney XD Worldwide

1. In my carry-on you'll find my iPad, ear plugs, a spare battery and a city guide to wherever I am traveling.



2. My go-to gadget is my iPhone 4S—with the right apps (*RunKeeper*, *Lose It*, *TripAdvisor*), it makes everything else unnecessary.

3. On the fly I've learned that watching local movies on the flight over is a great way to connect with people in other countries because you'll have something fun to talk about.



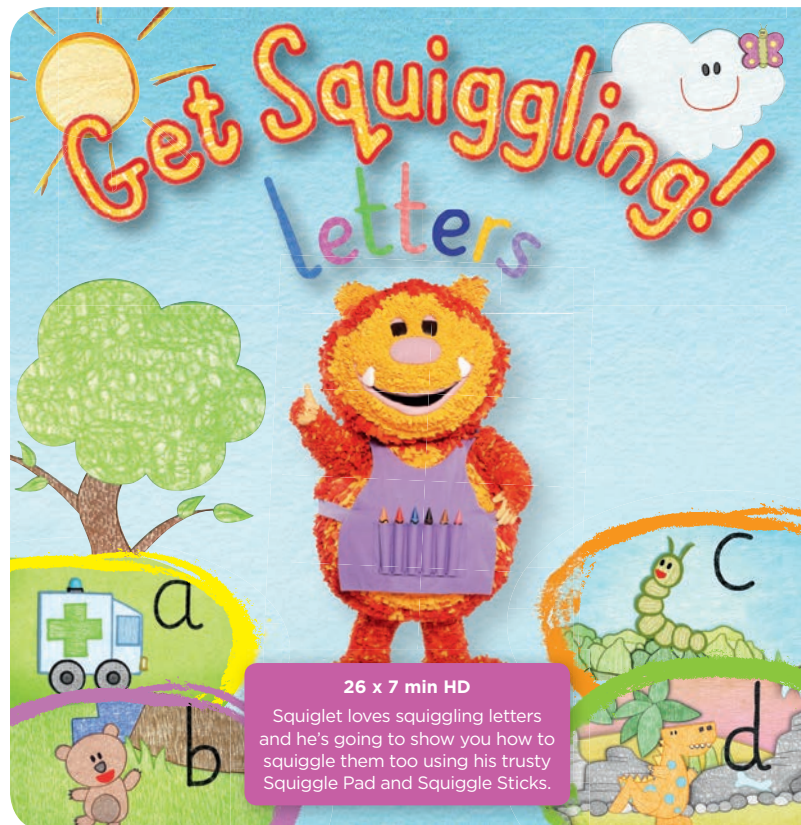
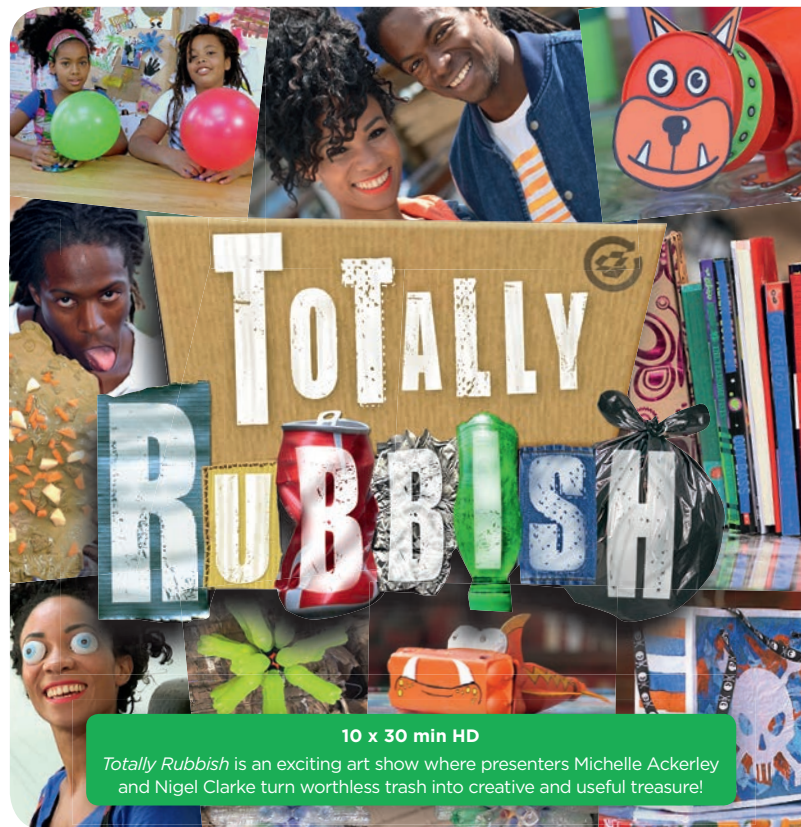
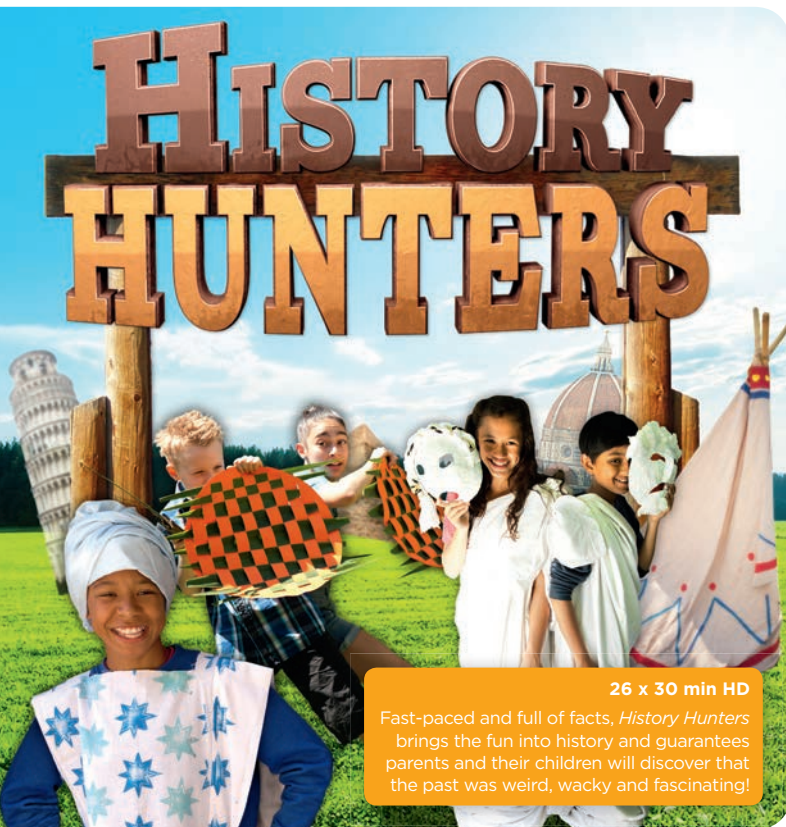
4. Preferred in-air tunes Tiesto or Scumfrog EDM podcasts

5. Best in-flight food Turkish Airlines business/first class—they bring an actual chef on board.

6. Best power-lunch Any beach restaurant in Cannes.

7. Window or aisle? Aisle—for the view and the lean.

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New preschool series *Lalaloopsy* is MGA's first full co-production

MGA makes moves into TV space

Forays into television are never easy, but Isaac Larian, founder and CEO of Van Nuys, California-based MGA Entertainment, believes that any successful toy company must conquer the fickle medium. "You just can't be in the toy business anymore," he says. "You have to be in the children's entertainment business."

To that end, Larian's privately held company has inked a deal to bring its successful doll IP *Lalaloopsy* to TV with a 52-episode preschool series, being co-produced with Moonscoop. It's scheduled to bow this month on Nickelodeon and air weekly for the next year.

While this won't be the first time Larian has tried his hand at entertainment production, he says he has learned from past mistakes. "We spent a lot of money producing 52 episodes of *Alien Racers*," he remembers. "We just couldn't get it placed anywhere."

By bringing a broadcast partner in at the beginning of the process, Larian has secured a slot on Nickelodeon, although its exact placement has yet to be announced.

"We co-produced, so it's different," he says. "I learned that if you go it alone and produce something without the right creative partners in place from the beginning, then you end up in an uphill battle."

Larian says that recent controversy over Nickelodeon's ratings has not dampened his enthusiasm for working with the network. "It is still the biggest children's network out there," he says. "We have tried [launching content on] YouTube, but now we're happy to be on a major network."

Lalaloopsy is a doll IP that became the surprise hit of holiday 2010. It has since spawned numerous popular SKUs and a robust girls-targeted licensing program with more than 200 global licensees including Scholastic, Activision and Fab. As a wholly private company, MGA doesn't release revenue records, but according to research firm The NPD Group, MGA's revenue grew by 23% in 2012 over the previous year. Larian points to the continued popularity of *Lalaloopsy* as one of the reasons for the impressive bump in sales. "There is really nothing like *Lalaloopsy* out there," he says.

Larian says the half-hour series will feature 2D animation and rely heavily on humor and "teaching life lessons in a humorous way" to a targeted audience of four- to seven-year-olds.

While there has been some discussion around creating special SKUs directly related to episodes of the series, Larian says the first priority is to make a unique entertainment offering. "You can't cheat children," he says. "You have to make a great product and everything else is secondary." —Gary Rusak

On the circuit

Notes for the industry travel diary

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Now in its 50th year, MIPTV brings together the ecosystem of TV & online content in the name of new deals and partnerships. The market is the place to be when it comes to greenlighting shows and forging co-production partnerships at the earliest stages of development. In terms of numbers, MIPTV draws a total of 11,000 participants from 100 countries, 1,600 exhibitors, 1,200 production companies and 500 digital buyers.

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➔ A full listing of Industry Events is available at kidscreen.com/events

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A promotional image for the animated series 'Filly Funtasia'. It features a blue unicorn with a pink horn and a purple flower in its hair, standing in a grassy field. In the background, there is a large, ornate castle with multiple towers and spires, set against a blue sky with a rainbow and flying butterflies. The title 'Filly Funtasia' is written in a large, stylized, pink and yellow font, and the tagline 'Magic, Spells & Fun' is written below it in a smaller, purple font.

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Stop-motion devotion

Screen Novelties delves into original properties after ratings success with *It's a SpongeBob Christmas*

What Using the latest digital technology and everything from foam, glitter, fabric and feathers to breakfast cereal, baking soda and wood chips, L.A.-based production studio Screen Novelties pulls out all the stops to create its unique take on stop-motion animation. Formed in 2003 by co-founders Seamus Walsh, Mark Caballero and Christopher Finnegan, the prodco has worked with the likes of Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network, Disney, Fox and Paramount on various projects. It even created the sock-puppet parody of *Flight* seen in the opening segment of the 2013 Oscars. With creativity at an all-time high, boosted by the ratings success of the stop-motion *SpongeBob Christmas* special it produced for Nick, the company is now focused on developing original IPs for TV and film.

Why take note? Nickelodeon's *It's a SpongeBob Christmas* marked the first time a full episode of the iconic toon was created completely with stop-motion animation, drawing inspiration from classic Rankin/Bass holiday specials such as *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* and *Santa Claus is Comin' to Town*. The special, which aired December 8, 2012, drew 4.8 million viewers and won its time period across all TV. "We felt like we were treading on hallowed ground with the stop-motion Christmas special, so we were relieved when the it got a great response," says Walsh.

Original stories Having successfully completed many projects for third parties (another standout being a two-minute, stop-motion dream sequence for Cartoon Network's made-for-TV movie *The Flintstones: On the Rocks*), Screen Novelties is taking 2013 to push its own original properties. First up is passion project *Witch Doctor*, a short family-friendly film currently in pre-production that's expected to be completed by the end of the year. Walsh says the main character was sketched about 10 years ago for a story initially developed as a feature script. "It's about an odd but charming witch doctor whose lack of control over his powers and spells causes bizarre things to happen around the world that he doesn't even know about," he explains. "We hope it will be a calling card for a longer-form version featuring the character." Beyond that is original feature film *Monster Safari*, which is based on a short submitted to Nickelodeon's shorts program in 2006. Although Nick didn't pick it up for a series, *Monster Safari* was optioned by The Jim Henson Company two years ago and the project is currently in development. The film follows the adventures of Bigfoot, the Abominable Snowman and the Loch Ness Monster who, after uniting all of Earth's cryptozoological creatures, decide to make themselves known to the world.

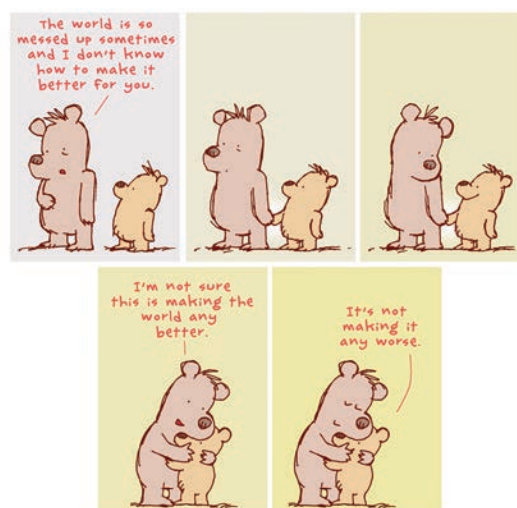
Next moves With plenty of film ideas in the works, Screen Novelties also has its first original kids TV series *Handlebar* in the development pipeline. The sci-fi western tells the story of a kid who becomes the owner of a giant magical mustache that allows him to transform into the sheriff of a zany, Wild West-type town. In addition, the studio is in the early stages of developing a concept for its very own Christmas special—nope, no *SpongeBob* this time around. —Jeremy Dickson



Currently in development, Screen Novelties' original feature *Monster Safari* was first submitted to Nickelodeon's shorts program and later optioned by The Jim Henson Company

Know your audience

By Jim Benton



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Turner Broadcasting exec **Michael Carrington** has left the company to take on the newly created role of head of content and production at HIT Entertainment's Global Brands division. The news came three weeks after Turner announced a company restructuring within its Europe, Middle East and Africa operations that would affect 30% of its staff (equalling roughly 250 positions and roles), which would potentially affect the kids channel programming team formerly led by Carrington. Based in HIT's London office, Carrington will lead a production team responsible for developing all content for existing

legal officer of the Canadian Media Production Association (CMPA) **John Barrack [A]** has signed on as strategic business advisor for content creation company marbledmedia. In this newly created role, Barrack will work closely with marbledmedia's senior management team with a focus on expanding the company's international sales and distribution arm, co-productions and new business ventures. Prior to serving the CMPA as COO and chief legal officer from 2009 to 2012, Barrack acted as chief negotiator for the association in its terms of trade, finalizing deals with all of Canada's

Zodiak Media while producing the series *Sous le Soleil de Saint-Tropez* and the international coproduction *Versailles* (in coproduction with Capa Drama). He will pursue personal projects and concentrate on being an independent producer. Meanwhile, **Yann Chassard**, who is currently preparing *Summer Camp*'s third season for TF1, will develop his own label, Dramatik, within Marathon Images.

In the toy world, Hasbro made new executive management appointments with COO **David Hargreaves** stepping into the new role of EVP of corporate strategy and

Consumer Products has added its first Moscow-based licensing executive as the company looks to drive further brand extension in Russia and CIS. **Petia Toncheva [C]** will step into the role of senior licensing manager for Russia and CIS and will manage and develop licensing programs across the Nickelodeon, Comedy Central and MTV portfolios for those regions. Toncheva will work directly with retailers and licensees, and with VIMN's Russian licensing agent, Riki Group. She is charged with ramping up the consumer products licensing business for stand-out new properties such as Teenage Mutant Ninja

where she was responsible for introducing the Yu-Gi-Oh! brand to all markets outside of Asia and growing the franchise to achieve more than US\$4 billion at retail. Nowicki also was responsible for driving the international expansion of brands including Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and The Cabbage Patch Kids.

In additional licensing news, consumer products exec **Peter Byrne** is stepping into the role of CEO of DHX Media's entertainment licensing company Copyright Promotions Licensing Group (CPLG). Byrne will look to secure further global growth for CPLG, which currently manages

people



HIT brands, as well as developing new properties. While heading up the EMEA kids content team at Turner Broadcasting, Carrington was instrumental in major acquisitions such as the 2011 purchase of the LazyTown brand for roughly US\$19 million. (He commissioned the *LazyTown* series when he was controller of CBeebies in the early 2000s.) Carrington also drove the EMEA brand rollout of Cartoonito, Turner's preschool channel. Carrington will be tapping that preschool experience to oversee HIT's portfolio of properties, which includes Thomas & Friends, Barney, Bob the Builder, Fireman Sam, Angelina Ballerina and Mike the Knight.

In other TV moves, former COO and chief

major private English-language broadcasters. In 2001, Barrack founded and co-chaired an international symposium on labor law and copyright issues in the film and television sector, which continues to be held each year during the Cannes Film Festival.

After more than two decades with the company he founded, **Pascal Breton** has stepped down from his position as CEO of Zodiak Media-owned Marathon Images, leaving **Philippe Alessandri [B]** to assume the role of CEO in addition to his current role as CEO of Tele Images Productions. Breton founded the French production company in 1990 alongside Olivier Brémond, who left the industry in 2006. Breton will continue to work with

business development. Hargreaves, a 30-year Hasbro vet, will focus on building the company's new business pipeline, identifying opportunities for long-term growth and fostering relationships with current and new partners. Hargreaves will continue to serve on Hasbro's senior management team as he has since 2001. In other changes, Hasbro North America president **Wiebe Tinga** has been promoted to chief commercial officer, overseeing all of Hasbro's global operating markets. Tinga will be responsible for all commercial activities in North America, Latin America, Asia Pacific and Europe.

And speaking of European commercial activities, Nickelodeon & Viacom

Turtles and Bubble Guppies, as well as evergreens Dora the Explorer and SpongeBob SquarePants.

Fox Consumer Products is also building its global retail and licensing business with the appointment of **Rosalind Nowicki [D]** as EVP of global sales and retail. The former 4Kids exec will be responsible for overseeing global licensing sales and major retail programs for Fox's film and TV portfolio, which includes *Ice Age*, *Rio*, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy*. She will also manage the global sales and retail divisions. Nowicki spent the past 11 years as EVP of global marketing and licensing, at 4Kids Entertainment,

the licensing and merchandising rights for such clients as 20th Century Fox, Activision, DreamWorks Animation and Saban Brands. CPLG has offices in the UK, US, Canada, Benelux, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain. Byrne previously held such roles as EVP of consumer products at HIT Entertainment, EVP of worldwide licensing and merchandising at 20th Century Fox, VP of Northern Europe for Sara Lee Branded Apparel and GM for Fruit of the Loom. Most recently, Byrne ran his own global licensing consultancy, working with clients such as Guinness World Records, Aardman Animations and Al Jazeera Children's Channel.

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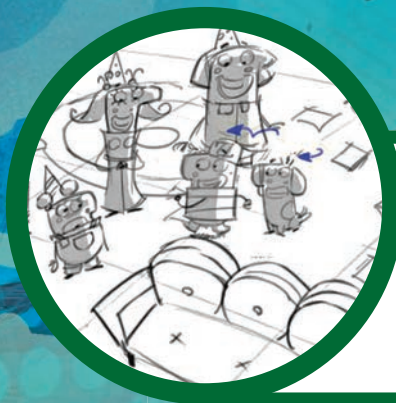
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To boost fan social media engagement for its kids talent series *The Next Star*, Canada's Tricon developed a brand-new cross-platform hub, Next Star Nation

Evolving social strategies

As popular social media platforms Facebook, YouTube and Twitter continue to impact the lives of today's tech-savvy kids and families, children's content producers and broadcasters are amping up their efforts to stay ahead of the fan-engagement curve

BY JEREMY DICKSON

When it comes to promoting and marketing kids TV shows via social media and maintaining kid and parent engagement, producers and broadcasters are arguably deriving some inspiration from Big Brother—they are watching everything, everywhere as kids around the globe increasingly flock to social media sites to chat about their interests with their friends. So determining how to reach audiences and react quickly to their changing needs across platforms is standard operating procedure these days, but how have social media strategies built around programming and marketing aimed at kids evolved?

Strength in character

While obtaining fully accurate stats on social media engagement in terms of return on brand investment or linear ratings may never be possible, the ability to make the most of a social media strategy often lives or dies with the strength of content and character.

In 2012, Nickelodeon's *SpongeBob SquarePants* was the most popular TV show in terms of total activity across Twitter, Facebook, GetGlue and Viggie, according to New York-based digital and social media business intelligence platform Trendrr. Even in its ninth season, *SpongeBob* still managed to beat out *The X Factor* by five million mentions.

"*SpongeBob* is a great example for social media, but it's because it's a great TV show first," says Maurice Wheeler, partner at London-based The Little Big Partnership, a youth and family-oriented marketing consultancy. "He's a beloved character and that's why the brand has been successful."

As *SpongeBob* was on-air long before the onset of Facebook, it had to catch up to social trends, but what happens when newer brands are born from social platforms? Does it put them much further ahead?



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Sharing with fans

For The Collective's viral-based IP Annoying Orange, success came quickly, beginning with a well-known YouTube series that launched in 2009, an early Facebook and Twitter presence, an expanding consumer products line, and more recently, a hit Cartoon Network TV series that debuted in 2012.

Currently, the TV series continues to rank amongst the top shows for boys in its timeslot on Cartoon Network US, and the web series has racked up more than one billion YouTube views. Add to that more than 275,000 Twitter followers and 11 million-plus Facebook likes and *Annoying Orange* has become the third-most-popular youth TV show on Facebook ever behind *iCarly* and *SpongeBob*, according to TV research agency The Wit. The series also shares the title of most social new teen TV show of 2012, along with Nickelodeon's *Fred: The Show*, also based on a popular YouTube character.

Because the TV version appeals to a younger audience and the online series attracts an older demo, different strategies are in play for each platform.

"To promote the TV show, we recently partnered with social networking service GetGlue and created exclusive digital TV show stickers," says The Collective's marketing director Kavi Halemane. "It encourages kids who are aware of the TV show to check in on GetGlue to unlock a different sticker each week."



The Collective's *Annoying Orange* TV series shares the title of most social new teen TV show of 2012 with Nick's *Fred: The Show*

One advantage the online series has over the TV show is the ability to stay topical by tapping into quick-moving internet memes. When the Harlem Shake craze began in early February 2012, an *Annoying Orange* version followed soon after. "You have to move fast, and that's how the show lives and breathes in the online community," says Gary Binkow, executive producer and founding partner of The Collective.

Halemane adds that the IP's social media promotions, which also leverage newer platforms like Google Hangouts, have been successful because they stay true to the characters' identities and conversations. "Everything we do is in the voice of the Orange, and the characters even have their own Twitter accounts outside of the main brand," he says. To pull off so much social media activity for the show, Halemane says every key member of *Annoying Orange*'s core creative team on the video side is involved. "There are a lot of people weighing in, but we make it work collaboratively."

The Collective scored another social media coup when it convinced Cartoon Network to cast popular YouTube personality Toby Turner in the TV series. Turner's personal YouTube channel currently has 1.2 million subscribers. "Toby is posting clips of his storyline and character via social media every week and so is YouTube star iJustine, who appears in the web series," says Binkow. Celebrity appearances from the likes of social media juggernauts Jane Lynch (*Glee*) and Felicia Day (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *The Guild*) have also brought added benefits. "These are artists who have global audiences, which obviously help us in our international exploitation of the show," adds Binkow.

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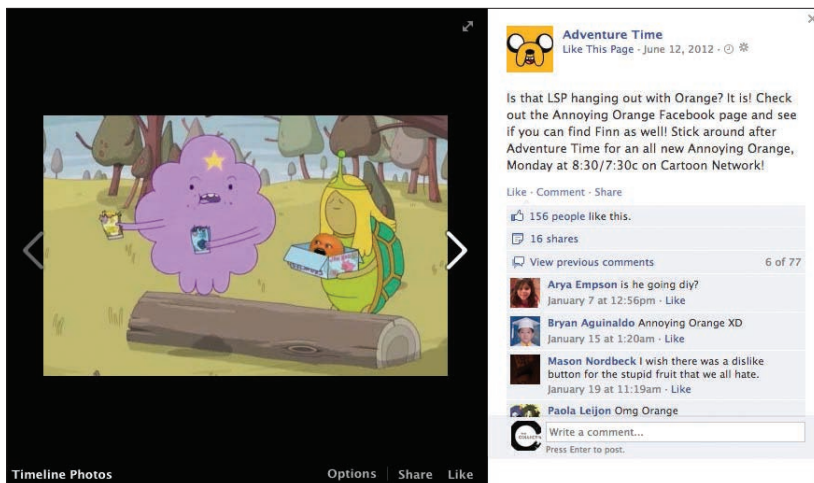


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Characters from *Adventure Time* and *Annoying Orange* regularly promote each other's shows on Facebook

Network engagement

From a broadcaster perspective, Cartoon Network has helped The Collective promote *Annoying Orange* authentically and is mindful to let the producers own the brand. "We work closely with them to develop ideas and celebrate the fandom around the property, but they own their brand and are masters of digital and social. We don't try to encroach on that," says Kelly Deen, director of consumer marketing for Cartoon Network US.

Living up to its name, The Collective returns the favor on a regular basis by working on TV-specific cross-promotions with some of the network's other shows (*Adventure Time*, *Regular Show*) on its social media platforms. "It increases awareness for everyone," says Halemame. One cross-promotion, for example, had characters from *Adventure Time* promoting *Annoying Orange* on the show's Facebook page and vice-versa.

With *Annoying Orange* in a groove and CN original series like *Adventure Time* taking off in social media circles, Deen says a lot has changed since she joined the network in 2008. "A few years ago, it was all about growth for us. We wanted more and more fans and likes," she says. "Now we are focused on engagement because with engagement comes growth. The biggest compliment we can get is a fan sharing something we've done, whether it's a Facebook share, a YouTube link, or a retweet."

Marketing to moms

Notably, implementing social media strategies for properties like *SpongeBob* and *Adventure Time*, which have significant over-13 followings, is a bit less tricky in terms of using platforms like Facebook that are legally restricted to users under age 13. Producers and broadcasters with shows squarely targeted at kids under 12 have to take a different approach when creating campaigns in the social sphere.

At US 24-hour preschool channel Sprout, for instance, moms play a big role when it comes to social media. "As Facebook emerged, we realized very quickly that it was a pretty important platform for moms," says Jim Multari, Sprout VP of marketing.

The networking site is currently Sprout's most active social platform with close to 290,000 likes. And Facebook, together with Sprout.com, sees approximately 20,000 birthday cards, home videos and photos submitted by viewers each month.

To promote its new original live-action/animated preschool series *The Chica Show*, Sprout recently launched a Share the Set with Chica Sweepstakes on Facebook, where families could enter for a chance to win a walk-on role on the next season of the show. The sweepstakes closed in February and Sprout received approximately 26,544 entries and 51,000 likes. Another well-received social initiative for parents was a promotion for the December movie premiere of *The Gruffalo* that featured six photo-themed Twitter parties each lasting 20 minutes. In total, the parties generated 631 tweets and 43,778 impressions.

Sprout is now looking at emerging social platforms like Pinterest because it knows Sprout moms are using the platform. It currently provides craft/recipe boards and more

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customized boards to celebrate seasons, holidays and milestones. In addition, all of the popular memes Sprout posts on Facebook are featured in an exclusive Pinterest board, such as its Chica "Chicks can do it" women's meme. "Pinterest is an area where we can continue to innovate and take some risks," explains Multari.

He adds that new promotional opportunities exist for Chica because the character also lives on Sprout's *The Sunny Side Up Show*, which is broadcast live daily. "When the live nature of a show aligns with the real-time element of Twitter, it's a great way to increase direct viewer engagement." Sprout currently tweets photos of the day, sneak-peeks of craft ingredients, questions for the audience, special guest announcements and themes of the week. It's also looking at ways for the show's hosts to use Twitter during commercial breaks.




As Sprout's most active social platform, Facebook provides an outlet for moms and kids to engage with the channel's stars

For Toronto, Canada-based producer/distributor Tricon Films and Television, knowing the ins and outs of Twitter is essential. Its hit

live-action kids talent series *The Next Star*, co-produced with Corus Entertainment's YTV, tracked more than 60,000 mentions on Twitter in Canada last season, and the show's September 23 finale was among Twitter's top 10 trending topics in Canada.

Deeper experiences

To provide an ultimate fan experience for season six (premiering July 15) and drive interest to *The Next Star*'s audition tour, studio tapings, in-store appearances and live finale, Tricon and YTV announced the launch of Next Star Nation in March. As the new brand umbrella for all of the show's social media activity, the cross-platform hub is not a standalone, but is incorporated into the site www.nextstar.ytv.com and a second-screen app. It features breaking news, exclusive behind-the-scenes footage, contests and sneak-peeks of upcoming episodes. According to Tricon's GM of production Marc Kell Whitehead, Tricon took it upon itself to develop the social media strategy for *The Next Star*, as it fell outside the usual requirements for its CMF funding. "It has become apparent that a social media experience is a necessary addition to all TV properties, whether for adults or kids, for both success of a series and in distribution," says Whitehead. "In a general sense, broadcasters are coming around to that idea, but increasing our budgets to include a social media experience isn't an easy sell." YTV, for its part, is partnering closely with Tricon on the brand's new second-screen experience. At press time, details were still under wraps.

"Every year we've increased our social media presence," notes Whitehead. "But our strategy is never finished, it's ongoing. Being agile is what makes it successful." 



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Moonscoop's live-action/CGI revamp of *Code Lyoko* helped the French producer build a new pipeline model

A new evolution

Tween series **Code Lyoko** gets live-action/CGI reboot

When France Télévisions and Canal J suggested to producer Moonscoop that it should take a risk and widen the demographic for the fifth season of its hit animated series *Code Lyoko* by adding a live-action/3D element to the animated production, the Paris-based animation studio accepted the challenge.

"The market today can be read in different ways, most often as gloomy, or pessimistic with no future, but that's not a very exciting way to wake up every morning. There are ways to innovate, recycle and rethink," says Moonscoop SVP and executive producer Maia Tubiana.

After securing a new budget of US\$9.3 million and replacing the series' 2D style with 3D and live-action, a new order of 26 x 22-minute episodes of high-tech action comedy series *Code Lyoko Evolution* went into production last year at Antefilms Studio, a France-based Moonscoop affiliate.

The new series, which targets boys and girls ages six to 14 and premiered January 5 on France 4, follows the adventures of a group of high school-aged heroes who must protect Earth from an evil computer program that can only be accessed through a portal to the virtual universe Lyoko.

According to Tubiana, working in both CGI and live-action with two teams was a challenge that required the producers to rethink their writing and shooting processes.

"We had to seamlessly blend the CGI and live-action effects and reboot the brand in a way that that didn't break the fans' link with the IP's existing DNA," she says.

On the writing side, the show's live-action head writer David Carayon worked with a team of five animation writers to ensure the sitcom and adventure elements of the stories blended seamlessly across the CGI and live-action sections of each episode, paying extra attention to storyboards from both sides.

Shooting in only one location meant the crew could also be very reactionary and work more efficiently.

"Our technical special effects director could integrate the specificities of the CGI effects to the live images in almost real time, and our actors were able to work with their CGI avatars regularly in the animation studio to help their performances."

Now that the studio has gone through the process, Tubiana says it's a unique model that can be leveraged for its future productions or by co-production partners. "The model exists in other genres, but not yet in the children's independent program pipeline. We produced the series in one year with both CGI and live-action converging in the same post-production pipeline," she explains. "It's also cost effective to group everything under the same artistic and financial supervision."

While it's too early to predict the ratings success of the revamped series, the show has been sold to a number of new broadcasters including RTBF (Belgium), Measat (Malaysia), Cineplex (Thailand), Canal Panda (Portugal), Canal + (Poland), Noga (Israel), Pravai Preuvod (Serbia), DPI Russia (Channel One) and MTV OY (Finland).

The brand has also seen increased L&M activity with newly licensed partners Simba (master toy partner for Spain and Russia), Futurescope (amusement park in France) and 3DDUO (online gaming). —Jeremy Dickson



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Keeping kids engaged through learning

India's ZeeQ takes a multiplatform approach to edu-tainment programming

The challenge As part of an initiative called Zee Learn that aims to prepare India's children for the 21st century via programs that educate and build life skills, ZeeQ launched on November 5, 2012 as a free sampling exercise reaching approximately 12 million viewers via DTH. The creation of the new net was also driven by a national research report that revealed a high percentage of Indian parents believe the country's existing television shows add no value to childhood development. The 24-hour à la carte channel, which is available on two of India's top four DTH and digital cable platforms, is owned by the country's largest media conglomerate, Zee Entertainment Enterprises. Starting to solicit subscriptions this month, ZeeQ claims to be country's first edu-tainment, multiplatform channel for kids ages four to 14. The channel faces competition for ad sales in the region from Turner's Pogo and Disney's Hungama. (It lost its closest content contender, CBeebies, in December 2012, after the BBC decided to shutter the preschool net's Indian feed.) And ZeeQ's most direct competitor now, in terms of programming, is Discovery Kids, according to the channel business head Subhedarshi Tripathi.

The programming ZeeQ tailors its acquisitions and production (75% animation, 25% live action) to the needs of Indian children as determined through Zee Learn's 18 years of experience running India's largest chain of preschools that reach more than half a million students across the country. Shows that have performed exceptionally well on its preschool block include *The Backyardigans*, *Sid the Science Kid* and *Mr. Moon*. For kids ages eight and up, ZeeQ offers a selection of locally produced live-action content, such as teen invention series *Teenovation*, real-life science application series *Science with Brain Cafe*, English-language game show *Word Match*, national team quiz show *M.I. Four* and magazine news series *Weekly Wrap*.

Digital initiatives As a multi-faceted content platform, ZeeQ reaches its audience in a number of different ways. "We're embedding aspects of our shows, including characters and story outcomes, into school lesson plans," explains Tripathi. Viewers can also tune into the channel via a live streaming app, and free game apps will be available by mid-June through ZeeQ's online portal. Further efforts to promote the channel include targeting mothers on Facebook, Twitter and mom blogs.

Next moves At press time, as ZeeQ was ramping up for its official launch, the channel was on the lookout for animated series—especially math and science-based shows for its younger audience. According to Tripathi, ZeeQ will produce any new live-action series for kids ages eight to 14 locally. "We are hoping to [get] one million subscribing households in a year's time, which is an aggressive target, but we already have a half a million kids' attention through the schools, so it's a good start," he says. —Jeremy Dickson

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NowTrending—Media

What's bubbling up in kid content culture

Disney's princess trend continues to charm

Since its January 11 premiere made television history by ranking as the number one preschool cable launch among girls two to five and women and adults 18 to 49, Disney Junior's *Sofia the First* has been on a regal roll. The series, which is currently the number one preschool cable TV series in total viewers and women 18 to 49, was just picked up by Disney for a second season and the property has extended into other categories including apps, digital storybooks, apparel, toys, soundtracks and online offerings. Looking to ride the renewed wave of princess popularity into an older demo, Disney Channel recently ordered *Star and the Forces of Evil* (working title), a new animated comedy series following the other-worldly adventures of a magical teen princess voiced by *The Middle*'s Eden Sher.



Disney's new direction
for Star Wars doesn't
include *Star Wars:*
The Clone Wars

A disturbance in The Force?

When Disney purchased Lucasfilm this past October, the future of the hit animated series *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, which Disney acquired from Cartoon Network in the deal, was undetermined. Last month, the show's fate was sealed after Disney pulled the plug on the five-season series and indefinitely postponed *Star Wars Detours*, the yet-to-be-released comedy series from *Robot Chicken* creators Seth Green, Matthew Senreich and Todd Grimes. But it's not the last fans will see of *Clone Wars*. Although Lucasfilm reported it will launch a brand-new *Star Wars* series set in a time period previously unexplored in the *Star Wars* film and TV universe, it will continue to produce new *Clone Wars* story arcs to tie off loose ends. At press time, details of where the bonus content would launch and how it would be produced were not announced. The cancellation also raises questions about the future of LucasArts game properties, including the much talked-about *Star Wars 1313*, a title now stuck in development limbo.

Preschoolers get more apps

Following the global trend in which more kids under five are able to access and use apps for mobile phones and tablets, kidcasters are continuing to launch more digital content for the preschool set. Canadian pubcaster Kids' CBC recently launched its *TV for Me* app, which allows children to stream eps from their favorite CBC shows including *Fuzzy Tales*, *Artzooka!*, *Monster Math Squad*, *Pirates: Adventures in Art*, *Dirtgirlworld*, *Polo*, *The Save-Ums!* and *The Doodlebops*. BBC Worldwide Channels, meanwhile, has unveiled *CBeebies On the Go*, its first original Spanish-language mobile app for preschoolers. Launched in February, the free iOS app lets users play interactive games and watch video clips from series such as *Baby Jake* and *Las Increíbles Aventuras de Andy*.

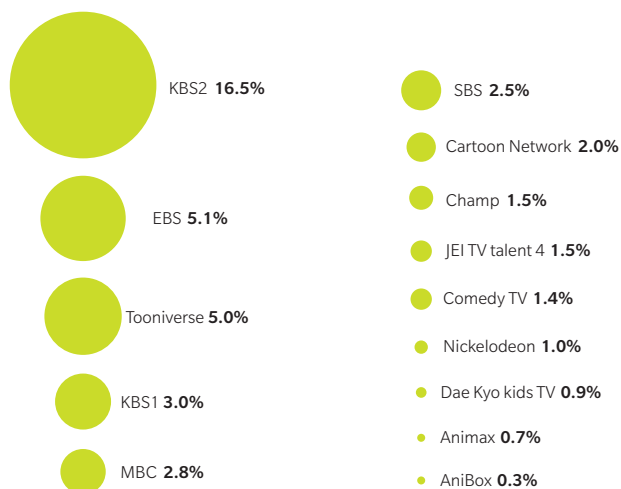
South Korean kids drawn to cable and free-to-air

Zeroing-in on the viewing habits of four- to 14-year-olds in South Korea reveals a love of manga-based series and educational shows



Detective Conan (season 10) is tops with four to 14s on Tooniverse

Market share Children 4 to 14



Eurodata TV Worldwide is a French company specializing in TV audience ratings research and market intelligence that offers TV data as well as expertise and insight into the performance of TV shows in more than 90 countries. Ratings information is provided directly by research institutes in each country, which, like Eurodata's parent company Médiamétrie, measure daily television audience ratings. For more information, contact sales manager Jacques Balducci (jbalducci@eurodatatv.com, 33-1-4758-9434).

Relying heavily on its family programming rather than its small children's block, free-to-air public broadcaster Korean Broadcasting System (KBS2) dominates in market share over the country's substantial list of kids cable broadcasters. In fact, KBS2's December 2012 share of kids four to 14 sat at 16.5%, a good 11.4% higher than second-ranked public broadcaster Educational Broadcasting System (EBS).

For kids programming, generalist channel EBS has the best-performing shows within its learning-focused schedule. And its 7 a.m. to 10 a.m. children's block is the best-performing block in the country.

In South Korea, 70.4% of households receive cable, according to TV research manager Johanna Karsenty of Paris-based Eurodata TV Worldwide. The two highest-ranked shows in all genres from January to June 2012 for kids ages four to 14 were *The Gag Concert*, KBS2's sketch-comedy/family entertainment series, and fantasy historical drama *The Moon Embracing the Sun*, from pay-TV commercial net MBC. The former series brought in an average of 1,511,400 young viewers during its best broadcasts, while the latter attracted 1,074,300 kids.

When it comes to specifically kid-targeted programming, EBS leads the field. *Gather Bingo's* average audience of 199,400 took top spot with a 25.4% share of four to 14s. Animated superhero series *Noonbory and the Super 7*, a Canadian-South Korean co-pro between Cookie Jar Entertainment (now DHX Media) and Daewon Media, meanwhile, captured second place with an 18% share (153,000 kids). Rounding out the top three is animated series *Jungle Book Shōnen Mowgli* (147,300 kids). Additional performers include non-Asian animated shows such as *Bernard*, *Oscar & Co* and *Mr. Men*.

When comparing children's channels only, specialty cable channel Tooniverse reigns supreme with a 5% share. Its schedule, one of the few in South Korea to target both boys and girls, focuses on shows drawn from manga. Season 10 of *Detective Conan* ranked as its best-rating series from January to June 2012 (93,600 kids/9.7% share).

Still trailing the top networks, but gaining ground, are male-skewing specialty channels Cartoon Network and Champ. Cartoon Network's best series for kids four to 14 was sci-fi manga toon *Kiteretsu Daihyakka* (31,700). *Doraemon* (30,000) took first spot on Daewon Broadcasting-owned Champ.

Lower-ranked channel JEI TV Talent offers programming such as *Redakai* and *Pokémon* for its 75% boy audience, while Sony Pictures Television's Animax and Daewon Media's AniBox air mostly Asian-produced toons for their cable and satellite viewers. —Jeremy Dickson

Wizards vs Aliens



It's one thing to launch a children's series in a fresh new genre that melds Star Wars-inspired sci-fi and Harry Potter-esque wizardry, but throw in backing from a creative force of nature and there's a good chance you've got a recipe for a hit. That's exactly what happened when BBC Cymru Wales, in association with FremantleMedia Kids and Family Entertainment for CBBC, rolled the dice on 26 x half-hour action-adventure series *Wizards vs Aliens*. Created by Russell T. Davies, the man who successfully resurrected *Doctor Who* in 2005 after a 16-year hiatus, and collaborative partner Phil Ford (*Torchwood*, *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, *Doctor Who*), *Wizards vs Aliens* made its TV debut last October. A full 1.3 million children ages six to 12 tuned in, accounting for 28% of all six- to 12-year-olds in the UK.

Fremantle and BBC take magical new series on a global trek

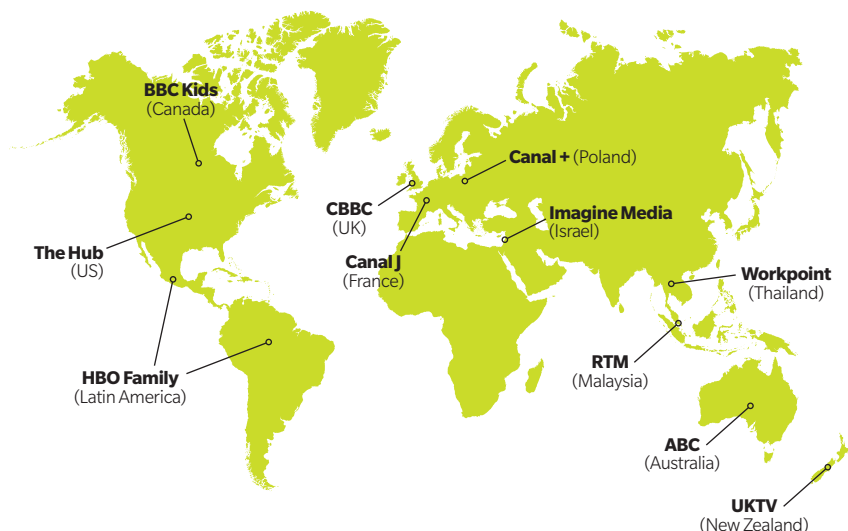
Growth spurt *Wizards vs Aliens* eventually wrapped up 2012 as CBBC's number-two premiering show of the year, and also struck a chord with teens. It's now been sold to nearly 50 international territories including Australia and New Zealand (ABC, UKTV), Canada (BBC Kids), Latin America (HBO Family), France (Canal J), Poland (Canal+), Israel (Imagine Media), Thailand (Workpoint), Malaysia (RTM), and the US, where the series will debut on Hasbro's The Hub later this year. *Wizards vs Aliens* follows the extraordinary adventures of two 16-year-old schoolmates, wizard Tom and science geek Benny, who must thwart an alien race known as the Nekross from stealing all of Earth's magical powers. Mirroring the teamwork aspect of the show, the creative and promotional groups behind *Wizards vs Aliens* formed a strong alliance from pre-production to post with one goal in mind—creating a global hit.

Smooth execution According to series executive producer Sander Schwartz (also FremantleMedia's president of Kids and Family Entertainment), Fremantle was instantly intrigued by the project. "When we first heard about it, there were no scripts to read, but it was the genre, the promise of the show and the talent associated with it that attracted us," he says. Eventually, Fremantle and BBC set up the co-pro and then worked to refine the scripts with Davies and Ford. "It came together much more quickly and easily than just about any show I've ever worked on," says Schwartz. To support the series, BBC and CBBC launched an on-air campaign that included a primetime promotion on BBC1 and a trailer spot that aired before the final episode of the newest season of *Doctor Who*, which drew approximately six million viewers. A second trailer also aired at the popular BBC-sponsored Proms in the Park music festival in London's Hyde Park, which is simulcast to cinemas across the UK.

New platforms Looking to increase awareness across platforms, the team created an online game based on the series, which quickly became the number one game for CBBC and the third-most visited URL across its website. In addition, special TV appearances including exclusive behind-the-scenes set tours led by the show's well-known and up-and-coming stars helped drive interest pre-launch, as well as the unveiling of a paid attraction in Cardiff (where the series is shot) that sits alongside the BBC's hugely popular *Doctor Who* attraction. "We'd like to extend *Wizards vs Aliens* into a full-fledged global franchise and hope to evolve our L&M in the next six months," says Schwartz.

—Jeremy Dickson

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Ubooly, a new interactive pet, was one of many Kickstarter projects at Toy Fair this year

Direct to consumers

Toy fundraising campaigns on Kickstarter are on the rise, bypassing retail as the first-look site for new products and driving consumer interest

BY GARY RUSAK

Over the last three years crowd-funding website Kickstarter has firmly established itself in the world of commercial film production. It has played a role in generating funds for more than 20,000 projects, with approximately one-fifth of the US\$500 million pledged on the site to date earmarked for film productions. In fact, about 10% of the slate of this year's Sundance Film Festival were in part funded by Kickstarter campaigns. But lost in the bright spotlight cast on film's success with the site is the fact that crowd-funding is also currently transforming the model for bringing toys and consumer products to retail. New York Toy Fair in February saw the unmistakable presence of Kickstarter projects that will soon be vying for shelf space at retailers around the globe.

The formation of a new investment and development model via Kickstarter is, of course, evolving through the process of making many missteps and mistakes. However, by taking a detailed look at how some companies have successfully launched their products using the site, a clear view of do's and don'ts is emerging.

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Ubooly

Developed by the Boulder, Colorado-based firm of the same name, Ubooly can best be described as a modern-day Teddy Ruxpin that utilizes mobile devices to transform plush into an interactive pet.

"In a nutshell it's a stuffed animal powered by a mobile phone," says Carly Gloge, CEO of Ubooly. "The magic comes from the software."

The app contains voice-recognition technology, and also has memory capability so the stuffed pet can recall past play sessions and "learn" its owner's favorite activities.

In February 2012, the developers put the concept on Kickstarter, hoping to establish enough interest to fund an initial production run. "We got a really strong initial response," says Gloge. "The early adopters gave us a good foothold."

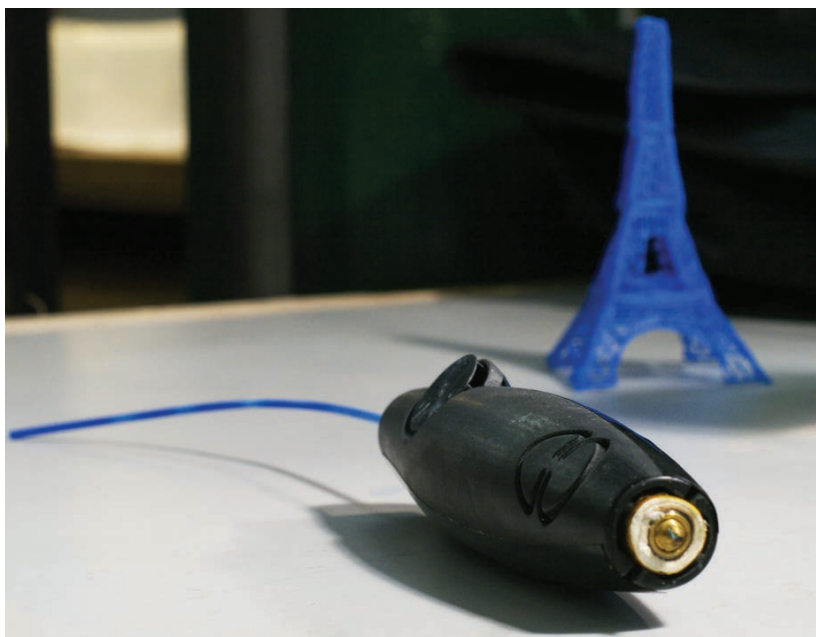
The company set a goal to raise US\$25,000 in two months by offering different levels of investment from US\$50, which entitled the investor to an Ubooly plush, up to US\$150 for a collector's version. "We raised US\$28,000 and that paid for our initial tooling," Gloge says, adding that the first shipments of the toys were mailed to Kickstarter backers last August. A second run of the product started last September and was available at major online retailers by Christmas. "This year our main focus is to get on [physical] retail shelves," says Gloge.

Although Ubooly met its goal and is well on the way to achieving broad retail carriage, Gloge says the company could have improved its Kickstarter campaign by featuring a shorter video of the product. "You should demo the product within the first 15 seconds on the video," she notes. "You need to show what you have right away."

Additionally, Gloge suggests it's important to keep Kickstarter campaigns active for as short a window as possible. "We did it for two months, and that was too long," she says. "I think 30 days would work well because it creates that urgency [for investors]."

3Doodler

The 3Doodler, a 3D printer-pen developed by WobbleWorks with the aid of Massachusetts-based Artisan's Asylum collective, is one of the most successful Kickstarter campaigns undertaken in the consumer products realm to date. The technology—a pen that can create three-dimensional sculptures with the patented use of fast-drying plastic—raised more than US\$1 million in only a matter of days earlier this spring.



However, the launch cannot be termed an overnight success, according to Maxwell Bogue, co-founder and CTO of WobbleWorks. "We spent a lot of time planning the launch," he says. "We reached out to several tech blogs and news organizations and our contacts, and managed to get stories out there the day [the Kickstarter campaign] launched."

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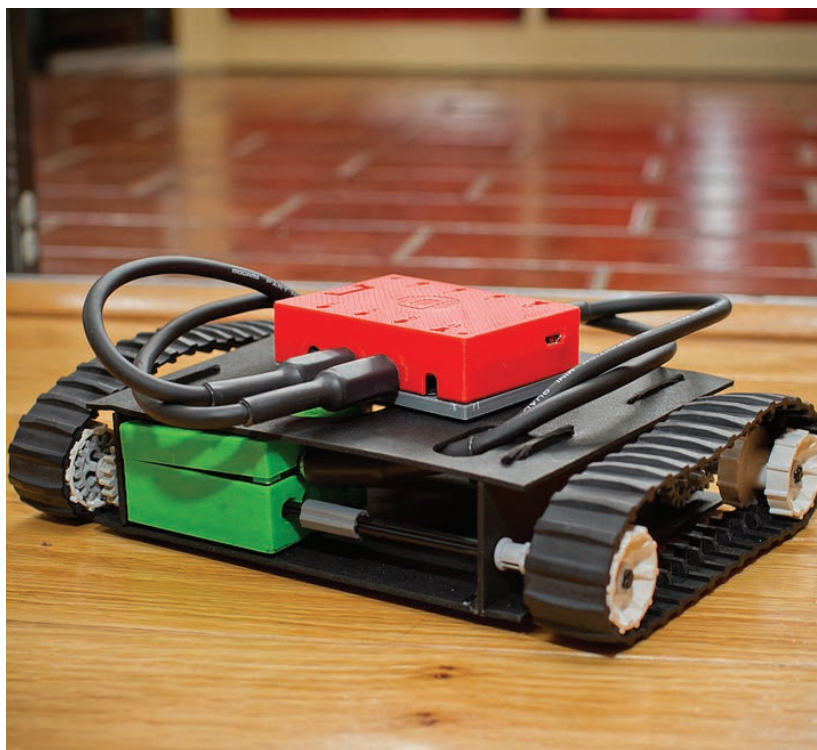
Promotion and outreach are key components to any product launch on Kickstarter, Bogue contends. “You don’t just throw a product up there and sit back and watch it work,” he says. “It’s like a product launch combined with six other launches — you have to be prepared to answer a lot of emails.”

A number of factors helped The 3Doodler campaign, namely a concise video that clearly defined the concept in a matter of seconds, the offering of a range of investment levels from US\$75 up to several thousand dollars for artist’s editions, and the creation of an on-trend tech heavy product.

At press time, more than US\$2 million in investment funding has been raised. “We’re talking to retail now,” says Bogue. “But first and foremost, we are going to service our Kickstarter investors.”

Atom Express Toys

Boulder, Colorado-based Seamless Toy Company created Atom Express Toys and decided that Kickstarter would be an ideal venue to raise awareness and capital for its innovative building blocks.



“It is a system that helps kids build things faster without electronics or programming experience,” says Michael Rosenblatt, founder of Seamless Toy Company. “Each brick has a motion sensor, and with a whole library of components, you can build whatever you’d like.”

There are three types of blocks available: sensing, logic and output bricks. Sensing blocks observe their environment, while logic blocks read the sensors and send that information to the output blocks, which then react by going faster, or stopping, or turning around. The basic set comes with 13 blocks that can be controlled through an iOS app and the consumer (ideally boys between six and 12) can develop anything they can imagine with the technology, from spaceships with blinking lights to buildings that self-destruct. The campaign for the toys on Kickstarter lasted 42 days, starting last November and ending on New Year’s Day.

“We did a lot of research on what the best practices should be before we launched,” says Rosenblatt. In fact, the company raised a small amount of venture capital to pay for a public relations firm in advance of the launch. In addition, Seamless made sure to respond immediately to posts on the site’s message board, guaranteeing a six-hour

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response time. "We had shifts of people covering the board 24/7," he says. "The back-and-forth is crucial."

Initially, the campaign video sketched out the big picture for investors and underplayed the fact that the toys are a type of consumer products.

"There is confusion in the crowd-funding community about whether customers are altruistic or just shopping for product," he says. "We found that they are shopping for product foremost, so we changed our video accordingly." To that end, Seamless altered the video to focus more on what the blocks can do, rather than their potential as a business idea. The tweak worked and the company ended up raising US\$183,000 over the course of the campaign. The average investment level for a set of 13 components rang in at US\$200.

Rosenblatt also points to the wide variety of investment-level options as another reason for his company's success—they started as low as US\$1. "The low entry point is important," he argues. "For that dollar, the investor can share the [product's Kickstarter] page on Twitter and Facebook and it helps get the word out—it's like they are paying you to advertise."

On the flipside, Rosenblatt says providing an "FAO Schwarz" level is also important. "When I was a kid, you would go into FAO Schwarz and they would have a Lamborghini go-cart or something for US\$10,000," he recalls. "Maybe they only sold one, but the promotion was worth it."

In the same vein, Atom Express Toys offered a US\$10,000 level, where the company would fly the investor and his or her family to Boulder to help the developers come up with new designs. "We ended up actually selling one, after the Kickstarter campaign ended," he adds.

"The fact that with Kickstarter the product is out there, and the public has already put money into it, removes one type of risk for the investor."

— Michael Rosenblatt,
Founder of Seamless Toy Company

Rearranging the investment model

All of the developers agreed that if used properly, Kickstarter is a valuable asset with the potential to alter the model for bringing consumer products to retail shelves. Traditionally, toy companies would go to investors with a prototype and market research that sketches out the potential sales for a product. With Kickstarter, developers can actually point to concrete numbers that express ready-made consumer interest in the concept.

"Any investor is basically looking at risk versus return," says Rosenblatt. "The fact that with Kickstarter the product is out there, and the public has already put money into it, removes one type of risk for the investor." The risk adds Rosenblatt—that an idea will not capture the consumer attention—is minimized since the Kickstarter investment proves there's significant interest.

Seamless Toy Company is currently meeting with potential investors and using its US\$183,000 Kickstarter haul as leverage in those conversations. [Venture capital investors] want to see audience reaction now," he says. "We have removed the need for them to suspend their disbelief."

Ubooly's Gloge believes that the model is new, but that only a small sliver of the market will be able to capitalize on it. "It works well for tech-based toys for sure," she says, explaining that the same people who are attracted to the Kickstarter website are usually tech-savvy early adopters. "It does give some validation, but I think developers should realize that it won't fund the whole process." ❧



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Licensee Lowdown

Plush expert Jazwares opens UK office

Who Based in Sunrise, Florida, Jazwares has been in the business of trend spotting since 1997. "We are about what's hot, what's new, on trend and what kids and adults are seeing every day," says Laura Zebersky, EVP of global sales and licensing. With an emphasis on forging master toy and plush licenses, Jazwares established itself early on with a Sonic the Hedgehog master toy deal in 1997 and has been setting up valuable relationships with mass and speciality retail ever since.

What Recently, Jazwares has become synonymous with creating innovative plush with its successful Plants and Zombies and Adventure Time lines. Zebersky says the level of detail incorporated into the product sets the company's plush apart from the competition.

"Sound is an important part of our plush," she says. "Our Plants and Zombies plush has those zombie noises and our Adventure Time plush has voices from the series."

Additionally, Jazwares has expanded the traditional dimensions of plush, creating a non-standard 22-inch category—a size that has worked well for the Adventure Time license.

Latest innovation Jazwares recently opened up an office in the UK to complement its headquarters in Florida and satellite office in Hong Kong. "We have so many lines that we want to be able to sell directly to the UK and we want to launch brands in the speciality market," says Zebersky. "About 40% of our revenues are from international sales and we think the UK is going to come out very strong. We are a new toy company in that market and we are offering properties that are fresh and new." Zebersky adds that the growth of new retailers in the country was also part of the reason Jazwares decided the UK was ripe for expansion. "Smyths and The Entertainer are growing fast and doing well," she says. "We think it's a good time to explore those opportunities."

What's next With an ever-growing roster of licenses, including Adventure Time, Plants and Zombies, Yo Gabba Gabba! and So So Happy, Jazwares has proven itself nimble enough to capitalize on IP that is ubiquitous and demographically diverse. The hunt for new and upcoming IP, however, is always a top priority. "Sometimes it's television, sometimes it's an app or a game," says Zebersky. "It could be anything, but we want a property that people see over and over again."

Contact Laura Zebersky, EVP of global sales and licensing, Jazwares (Laura@jazwares.com 954-845-0800). —Gary Rusak



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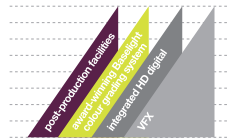
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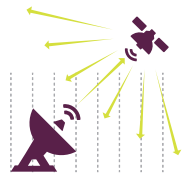
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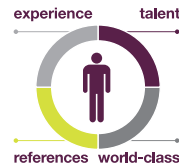
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My Real Toy turns kids' drawings into plush



Real DIY

Fledgling US toyco puts a new twist on plush, placing kids in the design driver's seat

There is nothing like a child's imagination. At least, that's what Alex Vante, the 19-year-old founder of Brooklyn, New York-based My Real Toy firmly believes. "What kids can create is unique," he says. "And I wanted to bring that to life. I always thought we could take kids' ideas and turn them into something real."

The newly founded company made a splash at New York Toy Fair in February by putting a fresh twist on DIY plush. To get started, Vante quickly established a website (MyRealToy.com) to which parents could submit their children's drawings (or photos of the drawings), and in a matter of one to three days My Real Toy would ship back a 16-inch custom plush.

With the aid of proprietary Swedish software that quickly translates 2D drawings into 3D patterns, five on-staff designers and six seamstresses, My Real Toy promises to deliver a wholly US-built hypoallergenic high-quality plush. A bit on the pricey side, the plush retail for US\$149.99 apiece.

"Everything is made right here," says Vante. "We thought about doing it overseas, which would be half the cost but customers would have to wait a month for it. That is too long."

Myrealtoy.com went live in January and within the first few weeks, with just a smattering of social media marketing and promotion, US\$30,000 in orders flowed in from around the globe.

"I wasn't really expecting the online business to take off at all," admits Vante. In fact, the company's primary efforts have been focused on developing retail partnerships, where in-store kiosks would be set up to allow kids to draw pictures and submit them on the spot. The retailer would then either ship the finished plush or have it available for pick up at the store location. Currently, Vante is in discussions with Crayola to set up a test run of My Real Toy packages at the manufacturer's flagship retail location in Easton, Pennsylvania later on this year.

"Our internet business is growing with minimal advertisement," Vante says. "But, now we really want to get that retail presence." —Gary Rusak

BookBet

Infinity Ring Book 4: Curse of the Ancients



Heading for retail on June 4 is Scholastic's awaited fourth book in its alternative-history time-travel saga: *Infinity Ring Book 4: Curse of the Ancients*. This edition is written by Matt de la Peña, who is known for Young Adult Fare such as *Ball Don't Lie* and *Mexican Whiteboy*. The

series, aimed at an eight- to 12-year-old audience, features the "Hystorian's Guide" map feature (named for a centuries-old secret society featured in the books) and a fully-immersive linked online game experience, where readers can travel back in time to fix history. (If only we could do the same.) The next book in the series is due in September. —Gary Rusak



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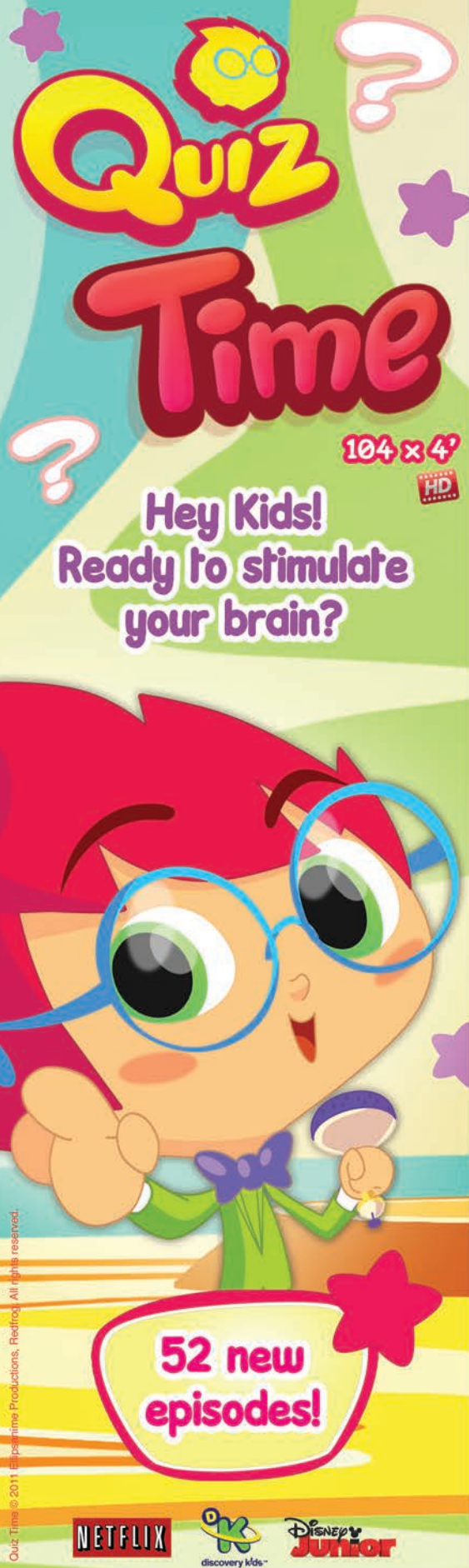
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Henson gets crackin' to revive South Korean IP

The Gangnam Style trend showed the world that South Korea might just be the next global pop-culture hub. In its wake, The Jim Henson Company has mined the territory in an attempt to revive the IP I Love Egg and bring it to the global market.

The project will be jointly steered under the Henson Independent Properties banner with EVP of global distribution Richard Goldsmith heading up the content side, along with Melissa Segal, SVP of global consumer products, who's taking care of the licensing angle.

I Love Egg, first developed by D&H, a Seoul-based media distribution company, has enjoyed a cult-like status in parts of Asia, fuelled by its unique design, a number of interstitials and webisodes, and a successful mini-figure vending machine business led by Japan-based toy licensee Tomy.

"It's kitschy, wacky and cool," says Segal, describing the broad appeal of the IP. "I see it as the same type of property as Domo."

Last month, Henson acquired the global merchandising and content distribution rights for the property that were previously held and promoted by UK-based brand manager Coolabi in the mid-2000s.

Goldsmith says that the market has changed since I Love Egg's first exposure to the global market, and broadcasters are now on the hunt for the type of interstitial content that I Love Egg offers. "The TV networks have been asking for interstitial content," he says. "When they ask for something, you jump. This is the type of program that can run anywhere from preschool to tween channels."

Goldsmith is currently shopping 37 short-form I Love Egg toons, fielding significant interest from channels in South America and Western Europe.

"When you see the cartoons, you soon realize there is nothing out there like it," he says. "The humor is so broad and well done it has such a wide appeal."

Henson will be officially unveiling I Love Egg at MIPTV this month. Segal, meanwhile, will be showcasing it to potential licensees, with a design-led tween-based consumer products program as her end goal.

"We are going to follow the distribution strategy," says Segal of the consumer products rollout. "We'll see which countries buy into the webisodes and we'll start there." —Gary Rusak

Skylanders keeps soaring

How Activision plans on pushing its hit toy/video game hybrid to new licensing heights

Santa Monica, California-based Activision's Skylanders franchise has generated more than a billion dollars at retail since the concept launched in October 2011. The innovative melding of action-figure and video game worlds has become an international success based on its unique gameplay and a carefully strategized licensing plan.

"Prior to the game launch, we secured about 10 anchor licensees outside the toy and interactive categories," explains Ashley Maily, head of global licensing and partnerships for Activision. "It was carefully orchestrated so that if the game was successful, which we thought it would be, we would be able to get products on the market right away."

Tied to the launch of the game was a selection of carrying cases for the action figures from licensee Woodinville, Washington-based PowerA, along with a small selection of apparel and other game accessories.

"Our strategy was to follow the game's footprint," says Maily. "We were going to have a massive footprint at Toys 'R' Us, Walmart and Target."

Activision then utilized the space already allocated to the game at those major retailers to introduce an initial, carefully selected assortment of products. "It was about seeding," says Maily. "The buyers were skeptical at first, but once the game was a hit, we were able to round out the rest of the merchandise program."

Throughout spring and fall 2012, the Skylanders merchandise kept rolling into retail with a number of high-profile licensees on-board in categories including plush (Just Play) and construction sets (MEGA Brands).

"We now have about 135 licensees worldwide," says Maily. "We are always looking to complement the main

product, so we aren't looking for action figures. We are careful about not cannibalizing our toy."

The particularly licensable nature of the Skylanders franchise, complete with its deep narrative and roster of unique characters, had cash registers a-humming throughout last year. Toys 'R' Us dedicated a 24-foot feature wall to Skylanders products and Walmart supported the core product and a number of licensees.

"This year retailers are coming back to us and asking us how we can make it bigger," says Maily, describing Activision's enviable position.

With the planned fall launch of the next Skylanders iteration, Skylanders Swap Force, the IP will continue to expand into previously untapped ancillary categories including bedding (Franco), board games (USAopoly and Pressman Toys) and publishing (Penguin).

"This year will actually be the first year out with the majority of the licensing program," says Maily, hinting at a number of soon-to-be-announced retail promotions. "We will be crafting something unique for each of our major retail partners."

The success of any licensing program is always part art and part science. So far, Activision has managed to expertly steward a program through the initial launch period and is now looking to solidify it as an industry stalwart.

"It hit at a time when the market was craving something," says Maily. "It was fresh and innovative and there was nothing else like it out there. It was a perfect storm."

—Gary Rusak

MEGA Brands got on-board early, releasing Skylanders construction sets last spring





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A construction boom

The building set category spiked 24% in 2012, making it the fastest-growing category in the US toy biz. Hands-on play may just be the antidote to high-tech toys.

According to Newton's Third Law, for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction—something we all know applies to physics, but who thought it would also work for the world of consumer products? Well, while the halls of Javits were chock-a-block with tech toys and app offerings at New York Toy Fair, the truth is that the old-school, hands-on construction category is having the last laugh—it has been triumphing at retail while those new categories have failed to gain traction.

"If it's an illusion, it's a good magic trick," says Gerrick Johnson, a toy analyst with BMO Capital Markets. "It has been the hottest segment for about five years now and it's continuing to grow."

A quick look at the numbers bears Johnson out and then some. After posting US\$4.04 billion in sales last year, Denmark-based construction toy king Lego is now valued at US\$14.6 billion, displacing Mattel at the world's top toyco in terms of market capitalization. As well, retail tracker NDP Group stats show the building sets category experienced growth of 24% in 2012 over the previous year.

"Before it was massive expansion amongst boys, but this year we saw Lego Friends tap into the girls market and it has been very successful," says Johnson.

The NPD Group's Retail Tracking Service put Lego Friends at the top of the list of growing properties in the category in 2012, followed by Lego Super Heroes, Lego Ninjago and Lego Marvel Legends. The only non-Lego product to crack the top 11 was Mega Bloks Build & Create Jr. (David Riley, executive director of NPD Group, notes that Mega Bloks' own girl-skewing product—Mega Bloks Barbie line—did perform well, but launched too late in the year to make the list.)

"The double-digit growth has really been amazing," says Johnson, singling out Lego as the company setting the pace in the category. "Simply put, parents feel good about Lego and they are, and continue to be, very brand-loyal to it."

But runaway successes don't stay alone in a category for long, especially in the toy business. Take Hasbro's own

construction brand Kre-o. Launched in 2011, Kre-o SKUs have continued to expand and grow, leveraging Hasbro's stable of IPs to propel the product lines.

"Transformers was the first brand used within the Kre-o line," says Kim Boyd, senior global brand director for the Kre-o brand at Hasbro. "We are now in more than 25 markets worldwide and are continuing to add other brands to the portfolio."

Later this spring, Hasbro will roll out a brand-new eight-SKU G.I. Joe line with a target of seven- to nine-year-old boys firmly in its sights. The SKUs correspond with the release of upcoming feature film *G.I. Joe: Retaliation* and will be available exclusive at Toys 'R' Us in the US.

In addition, the toyco has also partnered with CBS to bring another iconic IP to the Kre-o line. "We are looking to bring the Star Trek fantasy to life," says Boyd, explaining that the line will include seven SKUs designed to appeal to both collectors and the core-boy demographic.

"Of course, we'll have the USS Enterprise," says Boyd. "Being able to offer newness of product with classic properties and play pattern is a win-win for us."

While Hasbro believes that connecting iconic IP with the booming construction category is a winning formula, it was also evident to some vendors at New York Toy Fair that what kids and parents are really thirsting for is hands-on play, not necessarily familiar licenses.

"I had many retailers approach me and say that they liked what I had to offer because it wasn't a screen-based thing at all," says Carlos Neumann, chairman of Longmont, Colorado-based Zometool.

Zometool construction sets, ranging from starter kits priced at US\$59.99 apiece to sets designed for PhD programs at US\$1,300, have been on the market for more than two decades. However, Neumann says this year in particular his booth was hot. "There seems to be a push-back from parents," he says. "Everybody is looking for something hands-on now." —Gary Rusak



Getting sporty

Nick finds that kids can overcome the pressures in sports and focus on the fun



BY ERIN MILLER


GOAL! SCORE! TOUCHDOWN! No matter the sport, the feeling is mutual. It's the rush of excitement, accomplishment and adrenaline that keeps athletes coming back for more. But are these the same motivations that drive our youngest growing athletes? This is just one of the areas we hope to understand in our latest Kaleidoscope project, which explores the role of sports in kids' lives. In this report, we'll dive into how involved kids are in sports, their favorite sports to play, and identify how kids truly feel about playing the game.

It's no surprise that sports are a big part of kids' lives, taking up much of their free time after school and on the weekends. Almost 50% of kids ages seven to 14 play sports three to four days a week (during their sports seasons), with 20% playing up to five to six days a week (during their sports season). Most kids seem to be participating in two to three organized sports in a year. By the time they're 14 years old, they may have anywhere from four to five different sports under their belts. As kids get older, they tend to shift their focus from trying new sports to playing ones they thoroughly love, and where they believe their performance is better. As they focus in on particular sports at which they want to excel, they're likely to attend camps or specialized clinics to help improve their performance.

Boys list baseball as their favorite sport to play. This is followed by football, basketball, soccer and tennis. Girls commonly said that soccer is their favorite sport to play, followed by basketball, gymnastics, cheerleading and dance. When looking at the types of sports teams kids gravitate towards, boys are more likely to play on collaborative teams (e.g. football, basketball), while girls are more likely to take part in team sports where they compete individually (e.g. gymnastics, tennis). This is reflected nicely by what they listed as their favorite sport to play.

Photo: frankpierson



While kids enjoy playing sports for the most part, there can be a downside. Many kids put a lot of pressure on themselves when it comes to performance—factors contributing to their stress include parents, coaches and their own teammates. About three in 10 kids and young teens said that they've had a parent make them play a sport. Interestingly, of those kids that said their parents have made them play a sport, 73% are still playing that sport. While we know that parents are actively attending games/matches/meets regularly (85% attend "all the time"), they're also very present during practices. A full 64% of parents attend their child's sports practices "all the time." Though parents of boys are more apt to attend practices (69% vs. 54% for parents of girls), there isn't a significant gender difference when it comes to attending games/matches/meets. Despite the talk of pressure, most kids refreshingly said that the fun outweighs the negatives for them when playing sports. Almost nine in 10 kids and young teens are most likely to say that playing sports is "fun." This is followed by "something I like to do" (81%), "exciting" (75%), "cool" (65%) and "competitive" (64%). 

We will continue this exploration of kids and sports in part two of our Sports Report in next month's Kaleidoscope article.

For more information, contact kaleidoscope@nick.com

(Source: Nickelodeon Kids and Family Research, January, 2013; Touchstone Research. Quantitative Sample Size: N = 750 kids)

A major focus of the Brand and Consumer Insights Department at Nickelodeon Kids & Family is to live and breathe kid culture. We continually track and identify trends, and explore what it means to be a kid and teen today. In an effort to keep you in touch with our audience and give a voice to our consumer, we've created the Nickelodeon Kaleidoscope. Every month, Kaleidoscope will capture key areas of interest across the kid and family cultural landscape, provide an understanding of attitudes and behaviors, and report on trends and buzz.

Muse of the Month

Fan in the Mirror

Canadian teen Emerson uses music to define her moods and lift her spirits



We've all been there...in a less than stellar mood, feeling grumpy or sorry for ourselves or stressed, until a favorite song comes on to thoroughly change the vibe. Music has the power to uplift, calm or energize. So it goes for 13-year-old Emerson, from Ontario, Canada, who uses music to enhance or modify her moods. "If I'm happy I'll listen to Rihanna—her songs are catchy and lively. If I'm sad, I'll listen to Adele—her songs always have good messages."

But music has a deeper role in Emerson's life. It also helps define her. She began exploring her musical interests at an early age. She crows, "At 18 months I could sing 'Ahead by a Century' by The Tragically Hip." Go, Canada! Now she plays piano and saxophone and helps to organize the school talent show. Music is a source of self-confidence for Emerson.

Lucky for her, inspiration is so easy to access nowadays—from radio to TV, internet and mobile. Her favorite songs are just a finger swipe away through the MP3 player she carries faithfully in her pocket. And music-themed content, like *Glee* and *Idol*, bring her passion full circle. She recently discovered Walk Off the Earth's version of Gotye's "Somebody That I Used to Know" on YouTube. "Everyone at school was talking about it." While she may not always be the first to discover new music, Emerson is often a very powerful voice in embracing it, and using it as a means of self-expression.

Kids like Emerson are important to keep in mind when creating content. Beyond merely setting the mood, music can help a teen curate his or her identity. And if teens decide the content is for them, they can help generate the tuneful buzz that content creators crave.

—Sarah Chumsky



Insight Kids is a research and strategic consulting company dedicated to catalyzing our clients to build innovative, impactful and inspiring experiences for kids and families. To be further inspired by Reagan and Insight Kids, visit www.insightstrategygroup.com/insightkids/.

Cool or Not? The traditional vs. digital games edition



Photo: a adamant

	Boys 8 to 11 (277)	Girls 8 to 11 (289)	Boys 12 to 15 (285)	Girls 12 to 15 (288)		Boys 8 to 11 (264)	Girls 8 to 11 (259)	Boys 12 to 15 (282)	Girls 12 to 15 (277)
	23.1%	28.4%	8.4%	6.9%	Totally way cool *	64.8%	68.3%	41.8%	43.3%
	18.1%	22.5%	13.3%	14.2%	Very cool *	16.7%	14.7%	18.8%	20.6%
	43.7%	36%	47.7%	55.6%	Kinda cool *	9.8%	8.1%	24.5%	26.4%
	8.3%	7.6%	15.1%	15.3%	Not cool *	4.2%	4.6%	7.4%	7.9%
	6.9%	5.5%	15.4%	8%	Totally un-cool *	4.5%	4.2%	7.4%	1.8%
	2.1%	0.3%	2.7%	0.7%	Don't know what it is	9%	9.1%	3.8%	4.2%



Temple Run

* Excludes "Don't know what it is" responses



Cool or Not? is part of KidSay's Year End 2012 Trend Tracker. These one-of-a-kind research reports are published 10 times a year and provide a quantitative and qualitative picture of kids' likes, dislikes and trends gathered through in-school surveys with US kids ages five to 15. Contact Bob Reynolds (913-390-8110 or bob@kidsay.com).



Short circuit

BY WENDY GOLDMAN GETZLER

Through the use of bite-sized, relevant digital content in the recently launched *Nick App*, Nickelodeon has a new route to boosting viewer retention and ratings

As digital streaming video services like Netflix and Amazon continue to take on network-esque characteristics by developing their own original content, kidcasters like Nickelodeon are doing what they can to make their own content more accessible on-demand. Enter the *Nick App*, a newly launched interactive platform for the iPad that offers on-demand access to more than 1,000 pieces of Nickelodeon content as well as a continuous crop of interactive activities. The product also marks the first branded and TV Everywhere-authenticated app published by parent company Viacom.

"The iPad is as much of a kids' device as anything today, so it was time to bring Nick there," says Nickelodeon digital media EVP and GM Steve Youngwood, who oversaw development of the app. "We are bringing our episodes to the platform but are also creating new content for it." Among the content featured on the ad-supported app are short-form videos of original comedy skits, behind-the-scenes clips and photos of Nick stars and characters, polls, games, music, and full-length Nickelodeon show episodes. The latter will be available to the 50 million households

subscribing to cable services from AT&T U-verse, Bright House Networks, Cablevision, DIRECTV, RCN, Suddenlink, Time Warner Cable and Verizon FiOS.

"In the on-demand environment you don't have to worry about linear TV content—there is something there for everyone," says Youngwood. In making things more available for everyone, the app will soon be available for iPhone, other mobile screens and connected TVs. A Nick Jr. app will follow later this year, echoing characteristics of *Nick App*, but sporting age-appropriate games in lieu of things like polls and articles that appeal to Nick's older demo.

The app falls in line with the network's 2013 upfront presentation, which emphasized the importance of building community and engaging its audience across new platforms. Of course, a community is also measured in numbers—often of the Nielsen kind—and Youngwood says making sure content on the app is feeding TV programming, and not just vice versa, will further boost linear TV ratings. For instance, the new Nick Studio 10 daypart will air every weekday afternoon starting this spring, featuring kids who challenge each other to make funny content. What is created on the show will sync with the app and content from the app will air on the show.

Safety at the flick of a wrist



What it is

It only seems fitting that the world's smallest location and communication device is meant for the youngest of consumers. The VIVOplay wristwatch from London-based Evado Filip is a wearable communication tool for kids that serves as a tracking device used to locate a young child at any given time.

How it works

The device, which was first introduced in January, accesses location using an iOS and Android-compatible app that syncs with the watch. GPS, Wi-fi and cellular capability are all used together to determine location (and if a child leaves a pre-determined safe zone), and parents can designate five phone numbers that the watch can call. VIVOplay is designed for kids under 12 who may not be at the appropriate smartphone-toting age.

What it means

Undoubtedly, phone carriers will be watching as the VIVOplay launches this summer. The watch's communication and safety features make it a potential game changer for both parents and kids. As a recent Harris Interactive survey found that a third of US parents want their kids to have a mobile device in case of an emergency, the watch has the power to eliminate the risk of lost cellphones while placing a whole new communication tool into young kids' hands—or should we say onto their wrists. —Wendy Goldman Getzler

“That brand engagement only builds the connection deeper,” says Youngwood. “We originally viewed [the app] as a creative sandbox for kids, but it has turned into a creative sandbox for Nick itself. It will be a way to introduce and experiment with new properties, which in turn reinforces TV engagement,” he adds.

Tuna Amobi, a media and entertainment equity analyst at S&P Capital IQ, says that type of reinforcement is necessary to uphold the network's ratings comeback. The app was conceived and developed during a period when Nickelodeon experienced a ratings drop of nearly 30% (Q4 2012 results have shown a ratings uptick thanks to new content investment), and Amobi says there was an accelerated urgency to reach children through tablets and web-connected devices. “[Networks like Nickelodeon] are looking to provide more value to subscribers above what they are paying,” Amobi says. “So this app is consumer friendly—as the consumer can watch content on his or her own terms—and the companies can prove their retention.”

Amobi notes children's mobile activity takes place in short bursts, where content is parceled out in “snackable” bits. But with Nick offering full VOD episodes via

the app, that might change. “The app will definitely help viewer engagement, but it's hard to measure by how much. Nickelodeon can sell advertising, but financially it's like a trickle in a bucket—it's more to keep subscribers happy and engaged,” he says. Networks, he adds, can't afford to not be present on all web-connected platforms and devices, despite kids' fickle viewing and mobile play patterns.

But the one thing so far that has been a consistent winner among *Nick App* users is its Do Not Touch Button. As the name suggests, it is a large button that triggers snappy, outrageous reactions when touched—think burping noises, or iPad screens suddenly covered in that famous Nick slime. Youngwood notes fun features and add-ons like this help keep kids both engaged and entertained. And perhaps not surprising is the fact that the button was developed by a group of nine-year-olds during a focus group session. It was pressed more than 10 million times within the first two weeks of the app's launch, so clearly the group was onto something.

Of course, in the end it all leads back to the ratings where the ultimate goal—just like with the Do Not Touch button—is to get a rise. **k**

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TinyTap allows young kids to create—and star in—iPad games

New Kid in Town

Playing with emotions

The idea With game-creation website Roblox recently becoming the number-one online destination for US children, it's clear that kids' penchant for customizable digital play runs deep. Ten-month-old *TinyTap*, from the Israeli startup of the same name, is an iPad app culling the customization trend with its game creation platform that allows anyone—well, those five years old and up—to create personalized games using their own photos and voice recordings that can then be shared with and sold to other users.

The notion to create personalized mobile gaming experiences came to co-founders Yogev Shelley and Oren Elbaz in early 2012. By June of that year the pair launched *TinyTap*, and soon after received US\$500,000 in funding from new Israeli venture capital firm Inimiti.

Drawn to create *TinyTap* originally set out to target parents and teachers, but it quickly became apparent that kids as young as five were attracted to creating their own versions of question-and-answer-type games that also feature recorded voices, as well as photos of themselves, family members and favorite everyday objects. “*TinyTap* lets you create memories through pictures and games almost like a scrapbook,” says Shelley. The platform has gained particular traction with North American and European kids ages six to eight, who can swiftly create new games and then share them with their families via email or within a newly launched social community (users have the option to share a game privately or publicly). The company has found that kids as young as one are able to interact with the simple interface of the games created via the platform.

A good portion of game creators are also teachers, who are developing fast and simple language-based games that Shelley says are helping to hone pronunciation skills. “The most difficult part for us is deciding if the platform is primarily for gaming or education, but we are letting the market decide.” In furthering the gaming side of things, the company’s *I Love ABC* game, which was created solely using *TinyTap*, has recently been made available for iPhone devices.

Next moves With 100,000 user-generated games created to date, *TinyTap* just recently launched its social community that allows players to share their games and, if they choose, sell them to other users (*TinyTap* takes a 25% cut of game sales). “We want to get as many kids, parents and teachers to create and share games from their own experiences, instead of just keeping them in their own circles,” Shelley says. “As we progress, it is important that we let kids learn anything from anyone. So we are focusing on building the community right now.” His team of five is also placing a priority on marketing initiatives. The company is making games created using *TinyTap*—with consent from the game creator, naturally—available for download in the Apple App Store. Recently, four free games created using *TinyTap* saw a total of 20,000 downloads in two days. The company is also hoping to break into the integrated toy market and is in the process of meeting with companies to develop mobile games based on existing toy brands and characters. —Wendy Goldman Getzler

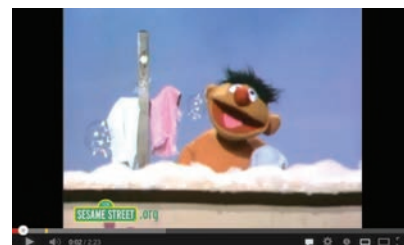
The Digits

Numbers that speak volumes about kids and technology

The number of kids who are reading eBooks has nearly

doubled

since 2010, up from 25% to 46%
(Scholastic)



Googly eyes—the number of *Sesame Street* video views on YouTube has swelled to a record-breaking

one billion

(YouTube)

But the streets of YouTube aren't always the safest —young viewers are generally

three clicks

away from explicit adult material on the site

(YouTube)

87%

of American teachers believe that modern technologies are creating a generation of kids with shorter attention spans

(Pew Research Center)



A full
two-thirds

of 11- to 16-year-olds in the UK download their own apps

(PhonepayPlus)



Perennial performers

At holiday time, kids get particularly excited when broadcasters roll out classic and new themed animated TV specials and episodes. The thing is, broadcasters also get equally excited by holiday programming, and for many it sits at the top of their shopping lists come acquisition time. And with Halloween and Thanksgiving-themed shows bringing in bigger ratings, kidnets are now looking to snap up even more seasonal content.

BY JEREMY DICKSON

For John Rooney, director of programming at Teletoon Canada, animated holiday specials and episodes are gifts that keep on giving. "The holiday special is the one thing we're always looking for," Rooney says. "Every time we look to acquire, we always include comedy shows for kids ages six to 11 and Christmas and Halloween holiday specials, because there is a home for them on Teletoon."

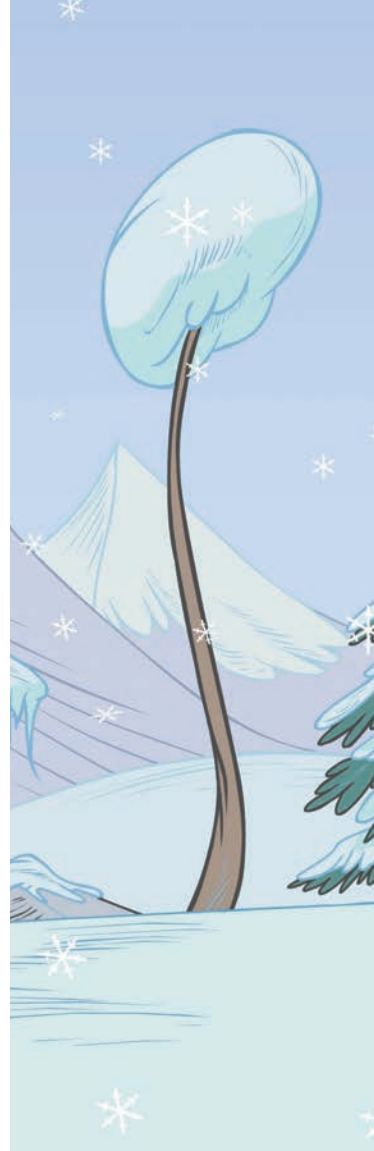
Holiday specials have also proven to be good investments for Cartoon Network US, according to the channel's SVP of programming and scheduling, Stacy Isenhower. "We're always looking for holiday specials because when you find one that is truly timeless and classic, it's something you're always going to want to have," Isenhower says. "Even if you don't necessarily have the budgets for them, you're going to try to find the money."

While a producer can never be certain a brand-new holiday special or episode will become a classic like 1960s *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, featuring the Peanuts gang, or the legendary stop-motion *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* by Rankin/Bass Productions, a number of newer holiday specials have started to leave their mark on today's kids and families.

Modern classics Despite the annual audience demand for classic holiday specials, broadcasters continue to watch for diamonds in the rough to keep programming lineups fresh. "We want to find newer specials that fit in with the classics and eventually grow them into the same sort of evergreen programming. We want new characters that will end up being classic characters," says Rooney.

He points to the success DreamWorks Animation has had in making holiday specials based on its popular movie properties Shrek (*Scared Shrekless*, *Shrek the Halls*), Kung Fu Panda (*Kung-Fu Panda Holiday Special*), *Monsters vs. Aliens* (*Monsters vs. Aliens: Mutant Pumpkins from Outer Space*) and *Madagascar* (*Merry Madagascar*). "They are starting to be known as those evergreen classics. DreamWorks Halloween specials have ranked in our top five Halloween specials over the past two years and have definitely entered into our top five for Christmas specials," says Rooney.

Last year, Teletoon acquired two new half-hour holiday specials, 2011's acclaimed stop-motion production *Jingle All the Way* from Portland, Oregon-based animation studio Bent Image Lab and Perishing Road, and its sequel, *Jingle & Bell's Christmas Star*. The latter ended up delivering Teletoon Canada's largest average audience for people ages





two and up among competing Canadian kids channels in its timeslot last year.

While DreamWorks and others have obviously found a balanced formula that works for new specials featuring new characters, DHX Media SVP of distribution Josh Scherba says most broadcasters still lean towards specials that are more classically themed. "We've tried specials in the past that were more contemporary in nature and we found that they just didn't find an audience with broadcasters that pick up holiday specials," Scherba says. "When broadcasters are looking to acquire, they are playing on the co-viewing and nostalgia factor—staying true to what classic holiday specials have always been seems to be quite important."

So, with the multitude of specials that already exist, how are new original stories standing out and proving they're built to last? Is there a tried-and-true formula for creating a great new holiday special or episode or is the process evolving for producers?

Hitting the right notes Lisa Olfman, co-president and founder of Toronto, Canada-based producer/distributor Portfolio Entertainment, has a go-to list of what good holiday specials should feature. It includes great stories with universal appeal, timeless songs and music, characters of all ages, a blend of physical humor for younger kids with a few verbal jokes for adults, and themes of humor, nostalgia, family togetherness, and most importantly love.

"Classic specials all honor the magic of the holiday season with that unforgettable feeling or shared experience of celebrating with those whom you love," Olfman says.

One character close to Portfolio, with which audiences have been enamored since the 1950s, is Dr. Seuss's *The Cat in the Hat*.

Portfolio got together with its co-producer, London-based Collingwood O'Hare Productions (in association with PBS Kids, Treehouse, Random House, Ottawa, Canada-based Pip Animation and Canada's Shaw Rocket Fund) to develop *The Cat in the Hat Knows a Lot About Christmas!* The

Portfolio's *The Cat in the Hat Knows a Lot About Christmas!* was tops among all US kidsnets during Thanksgiving week 2012



Newer holiday specials like DreamWorks' *Scared Shrekless* are becoming today's classics

hour-long holiday special is based on the Portfolio/Collingwood series *The Cat in the Hat Knows a Lot About That!*

After its US debut on PBS Kids last November, the show ranked as the top-rated special among all US kids networks during Thanksgiving week, reaching more than 4.2 million children ages two to 11 and 5.5 million households across the US, according to Nielsen Television Index. The special was also streamed 27 million times online and via the PBS Kids video app in that same month, marking the highest number of streams ever in one month for a PBS Kids program (Google Analytics Event Tracking).

"Because the series had been doing so well not only with preschoolers, but also with older kids, moms and caregivers, we thought it would be great to produce something with the intention of including a wider audience," says Olfman. "What we loved about the *Cat* special, which took 18 months to complete, was we were able to tell a bigger story."

Mixing classic with contemporary, the producers kept the design of the special in line with the series, staying true to the original look and feel of the Dr. Seuss books. Updates took the form of the creation of characters not depicted in the books and new original songs and music.

In terms of cost, Olfman says holiday specials are not inexpensive, but Portfolio was able to produce *The Cat in the Hat Knows a Lot About Christmas!* as frugally as possible on a budget of US\$1.2 million, because it was part of the existing series' pipeline and not a standalone.

According to Scherba, one-off specials pose more challenges than just financial ones. "It's hard when you are trying to establish a new holiday special without the benefit of having characters kids already know. If you're introducing a concept for the first time, it comes back to having strong storytelling and characters."

DHX, which owns a host of holiday-themed movies, specials and episodes produced for key titles like *Johnny Test*, *Yo Gabba Gabba!*, *Caillou*, *Strawberry Shortcake* and *The Busy World of Richard Scarry*, typically looks to make a couple of holiday episodes per each regular 52 x 11-minute ep season. "The Christmas episode is a must, but we expand beyond it to cover other holidays throughout the year, whether it's Valentine's Day or even Halloween," explains Scherba. "We used to think of Halloween as just a North American holiday, but it now has enough of an international appeal that we look to create spooky-themed content, even if not explicitly Halloween-themed, in any of our longer running series."

Trick or treat With the influx of American culture around the world, international saleability has become a significant factor in making holiday specials even more attractive. "It wasn't that long ago that you would never consider a Halloween special for Europe," notes Scherba. "But now, whether that holiday is actually embraced or celebrated in any individual European country, the fact is that kids are used to watching US content that talks about these holidays. Having Halloween episodes doesn't preclude kids from understanding what they are about and enjoying them," he contends.

One property with global appeal on which Teletoon Canada relies at Halloween, features a certain famous Great Dane. "We tend to focus more on movies than specials and what's worked for us, aside from the DreamWorks content, is using *Scooby-Doo* to our ultimate capacity," says Rooney. The channel currently licenses 19 *Scooby-Doo* movies from Warner Bros. that continue to rate well. In terms of new Halloween acquisitions, Teletoon didn't

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PLAYBACK

Have a holly jolly... special

DHX Media SVP of distribution Josh Scherba offers his top five tips for making a great holiday special

1) Whether making a holiday episode of a long-form series or a standalone holiday special, it's important to know who you're targeting and tailor it to them. Some of the best family holiday specials are written with the entire family in mind.

2) Stay away from specific religious holidays as themes in specials. Instead, explore themes that are holiday-centric without appealing to any specific religious group, so it can appeal to a wider audience.

3) When adapting a long-form series into a holiday special format, be true to your characters—their personalities wouldn't change just because they're starring in a special.

4) When adapting a long-form series, ask, "Why does this story need to be told in a longer format? Is the journey big enough to warrant a special and not just a holiday-themed episode?"

5) Think about how to make the special visually stand out from the series, if you're developing a special around an existing brand. You don't have to change all of the assets already built, just think about the added visual value that you can bring to the special to make it unique and stand out from the other content available, for example the inclusion of snowy landscapes, Halloween-themed haunted houses, summer getaway location, etc.

pick up anything last year, but it did scoop up L.A.-based Kickstart Entertainment's new 45-minute animated special *Dear Dracula* for 2013.

Cartoon Network has also found success airing movies at Halloween, as well as Halloween-themed eps from its original series including *Adventure Time* and *Regular Show*. In fact, the latter's "Terror Tales of the Park 2" episode rated quite well across all key demographics last year, drawing 1.6 million viewers ages six to 11 in the US. Looking to ride the wave this year, the channel is banking on the series again and has commissioned a brand-new Thanksgiving-themed *Regular Show* episode that will air in November.

When it comes to scheduling holiday programming at Cartoon Network, timing is key. According to Isenhower, the channel usually looks to air specials in primetime earlier in December. As Christmas gets closer, it will play specials throughout the day when kids are out of school spending more time at home. "As we get closer to the Christmas holiday, we typically see kids' appetite for anything other than holiday programming start to wane because they get so excited about the holiday," she says.

Cartoon Network also runs two successful Christmas holiday events outside of its regularly scheduled specials. The Flicksmas block, which has aired for the last three years, offers a different family-friendly movie every night for the



Bent Image Lab's *Jingle & Bell's Christmas Star* drew stellar ratings for Teletoon Canada

Olfman notes that no matter what seasonal celebrations are tied to programming internationally, "broadcasters are looking to provide something unique for their audiences that they can create great marketing opportunities around."

The complete package According to Rooney, since Halloween and Christmas are the two biggest times of the year for Teletoon from both programming and strategy perspectives, the kidcaster makes a concerted effort to change its schedule to evoke these holidays.

"From a marketing perspective, we have to make sure we have the right branding," says Rooney. The channel's Christmas programming, branded "Snowed In" for the past four years, and last year's "Monster Mash Up" Halloween schedule, feature on-air promos, bumpers and IDs, and site takeovers and banners online.

The packaging has paid off. Holiday specials have had a big impact on the channel's ratings. For the two-week period leading up to Halloween 2012, Teletoon's English-language channel saw an increase in daytime average audience of 41% with kids ages two to 11 and 50% with adults ages 18 to 49, versus the previous year.

week leading up to Christmas. CN's second event, 24 Hours of Christmas, has also been a hit. "We start on Christmas Eve and air every Christmas special we have back-to-back-to-back into Christmas Day," says Isenhower.

In addition to broadcast opportunities, it's impossible to forget the impact holiday specials have on home entertainment retail sales.

"Part of the appeal when we are doing holiday specials is the knock-on effect it has for traditional DVD," says Scherba. "There tends to be more shelf space around the holidays, and if you have themed DVD releases, there is some benefit to that."

The big challenge for DVD sales this year is the ever-growing competition from SVOD providers like Netflix, but Scherba foresees digital sell-through opportunities such as themed events for the release of holiday-themed episodes or packages on iTunes or Amazon.

"Eventually there will be increased value there, which could be part of the motivation for why distributors and producers continue to look to holiday specials."



Showrunner Michael Poryes' *Life With Boys* (above) was his successful follow-up to *Hannah Montana*. He says showrunner success is often found in the details.

Running the show

A production can often be described as an expensive, but organized, cacophony of competing monetary and creative interests. Toeing the tightrope that hangs over the sometimes death-defying chasm between artistic goals and financial demands is none other than the modern showrunner—at least when it comes to series made in North America. In that territory, showrunner-led series making has become the defacto model. Considering employing it for your next project? Let's have a look at its upside and challenges.

BY GARY RUSAK

So first and foremost, what does a showrunner do? "You are basically responsible for everything," says Michael Poryes, the creator and showrunner of hit live-action tween series *Hannah Montana*, *That's So Raven* and *Life with Boys*. "You are the captain of the ship," he adds. "You need to make sure that everything is sailing smoothly."

Tom Lynch, a long-time showrunner and founder of indie prodco The Tom Lynch Company, agrees. "A showrunner is in charge of the financial and creative and basically oversees every element of the show," he says. While he does remember a time when the "boss" was also the "head writer," a "senior producer" or even a "producer-director," Lynch contends that the industry has since evolved. "It's turned into a one-person, one-vision operation," he says.

In fact, being able to envision the fully developed creative and financial package for a commissioning network and its audience is the showrunner's job.

"The showrunner is someone who provides the clear vision and style of the series," says Damien Tromel, head of acquisitions and creative at DreamWorks Classics. "Sometimes a show is pitched as A, but when it's delivered, it's more like C or D. The showrunner has to be the one that makes sure that does not happen."

Captain of the Ship, Head Alchemist, The Big Cheese—all of these titles seem to apply. Typically on a big network series, a showrunner will be responsible for more than 100 employees, and everyone from the line producer to the camera operator and makeup artists look to the showrunner for instruction and inspiration. Additionally, the showrunner has to be able to communicate with the upper brass putting up the money for the production. “The good ones know how to manage the language of network executives and producers and directors, and at the same time, maintain that clear vision,” says Tromel.

The demands Not surprisingly, putting in hours to prep a production is key to a showrunner’s efficacy. “You are trying to put out fires before they start,” says Poryes. “You don’t want it to get to the point where you have to say, ‘The buck stops here.’ You want to stop that problem before the buck even approaches your desk.”

And typically, the showrunner’s biggest concern is keeping everything on or under budget. “You never ever have enough money,” says Christina Jennings, chairman and CEO of Toronto, Canada-based Shaftesbury Films. “You always have to have a fallback plan, because something inevitably happens and you discover one episode is going to cost you more than you can imagine.”

The financial ins and outs can be mediated by experience and knowing, for instance, when to scrap ambitious location-based shoots and grand sets. “If my line producer sends

out a flare and says, ‘We’re getting close to budget,’ I have to make adjustments on the fly,” says Poryes. “Sometimes you have to create a story that takes place on the sets you have already built—that’s known as a Bottle Show.”

At times like these, it is imperative that the showrunner has the confidence in the show’s core tenets to resist the urge to employ an expensive set and go over budget. “Ultimately, it’s about the writing, the acting and the story,” contends Poryes. “It’s not about a cool set.”

Another trick to keeping within budgetary constraints is to stick to a well-planned and thought-out schedule, something a good showrunner will take into account during the writing process, particularly with kid-focused programming. For example, kids live-action shows are more often subject to regulations that mandate the number of hours a child actor can be on the set. The regulations vary according to filming location and it’s a showrunner’s responsibility to be aware of which ones must be followed. Poryes, who says he tries to operate on the set as a “parent first,” has adapted the structure of his shows to make room for necessary contingencies.

“I only have a certain amount of time [with the actors], and I have to design the scripts with that in mind,” he says, adding that he writes a secondary storyline for each episode so the lead kid actor doesn’t have to be on-screen the entire time.

On the creative side, there’s the issue of creating an environment where teamwork and collaboration are

The art of show-running

A few tips for the trade

1) Respect your staff

Knowing the name of everyone working on a production is just the beginning. Keeping a happy set is the best way to ensure everyone does their jobs.

2) Be specific

“The more specific you are with your vision, the better your chances are of achieving it,” says Tom Lynch, founder of prodco The Tom Lynch Company. Knowing what they want and communicating it is what showrunners are hired to do.

3) Know something about everything

“Coming up the ranks, you should try and learn a bit about everything that occurs during production,” says showrunner Michael Poryes. “You don’t have to know everything, but you have to have some appreciation for what everyone is doing.”

4) Remain calm

No one respects a hot-head and although the pressures can mount, keeping a serene demeanor during production is a must. “Don’t take your stress and frustration out on everyone,” says Poryes. “They are there to help.”

5) Watch more TV

“When I meet people in the industry who don’t watch a lot of television, it doesn’t make a whole lot of sense to me,” says marbledmedia co-CEO Matt Hornburg. “Showrunners have to be aware of the industry and cautious not to repeat everything, but they also have to be able to ride the trend wave at the same time.”

The Tom Lynch Company’s
Nick live-action series
The Troop





Toronto, Canada-based marbledmedia's production *Skatoony*—the prodco is experimenting with a two-showrunner system

encouraged, but where final decisions rest firmly with the showrunner. “You have to let artists bring something good to a production within a box,” notes Lynch, attempting to describe the tenuous nature of creative work. “You make all the decisions, but you have to merge all the creative ideas together.”

Something that goes a long way towards mediating the creative collaboration conundrum is simply treating the professionals on set as just that—professionals. “You have to keep all of your staff happy,” says Poryes. “You have to [mindfully] respect everyone’s contribution and give credit where credit is due.”

As an example, he relates a story of a director who consistently addressed a camera operator as Camera Three. Not surprisingly, it was Camera Three who slightly missed the mark on a key shot for the production. “We all do a lot of work, but if it isn’t filmed properly, it’s not going to do much good,” he adds. “If you don’t treat your staff right, you aren’t going to get 100% out of them.”

Even little things, like food provided on the set, can be a big thing in making a better finished product. “If people want a good lunch, they aren’t going to be happy with peanuts and stale doughnuts,” says Poryes. “If you treat people right, then they will go the extra mile for you.”


Additionally, the showrunner has to remain steadfast in enforcing his or her vision, even if that means halting production. It’s rare that a series starts shooting and then completely stops—but it does happen. Lynch recalls starting filming on Nickelodeon live-action series *Caitlin’s Way* (2000–2002). “We were shooting in Calgary, and after three days, I had to shut the show down for three weeks,” he says.

Lynch’s reasons included trouble with the casting and a problem with the look of the show. While the decision sent

shockwaves through the corporate office, the embattled showrunner knew that the risk was worth it. “I had an order for 20 episodes and I could have ruined the whole order if I had kept going,” he remembers. “That is the most radical thing you would ever have to do, but in the end the series ran for three years—so I know it was the right decision.”

A tale of two showrunners The enormous pressure and stress placed on a singular showrunner, who is tasked with navigating both creative and financial pitfalls to deliver a series, has given birth to a new approach that might be catching on in production circles.

“The networks want to have those fresh voices, but they also want experienced showrunners,” says Matt Hornburg, co-CEO and an executive producer for Toronto, Canada-based prodco marbledmedia. “For that reason, we are now pairing young creators, who can come in with a fresh take, with someone who has showrunning experience [to create a complete package].”

The prodco is putting the innovative idea to use for a soon-to-be-announced live-action production. Hornburg says that while young inexperienced showrunners like *Girls’* Lena Dunham have proven they have the chops to handle the delicate task, the networks and producers often thirst for the security of having someone they know and trust overseeing their investment. It’s too early to know the results of the proposed two-showrunner system—it will take many productions before a reasonable accounting can be made. While the idea is to have one new creative voice and another more seasoned bottomline decision-maker work together, obviously a great deal will rely on the personalities of the showrunners and how well they get along. However, Hornburg is not deterred. “It’s a model we intend to follow,” he says. 

Cool new shows!

BY LANA CASTLEMAN



girls
6 to 12

Concept The notion that being famous, for tweens and teens, is now secondary to shaping and creating their own entertainment, underpins this new music-and-magic series, says Marathon Media GM David Michel. It tells the very personal journey of Iris, an ordinary girl who takes a chance and auditions for all-girl band Lolirock. After she makes the cut, Iris soon discovers a mysterious world of magical powers and secret kingdoms awaits her. To help get viewers involved at the outset, Marathon will be teasing the show on YouTube pre-launch via a series of animated music videos featuring Lolirock, the group, singing songs created with the help of a famed French DJ. Additionally, local bands will be assembled in each key territory where the show airs to amp up promo.

Lolirock

Producer Marathon Media (a Zodiak Kids company, France)

Style CGI

Format 52 x half hours

Budget US\$22 million

Status France Télévisions and Disney Channel France are on-board as commissioning broadcasters, and the series, being penned by Madeline Paxson (*Kim Possible*, *Tarzan*, *Lilo & Stitch*), is just heading into production.

Delivery Fall/winter 2013

preschool

Wish Come True

Co-producers Guru Studio (Canada), Home Plate Entertainment (US)

Style CGI

Format 52 x 11 minutes

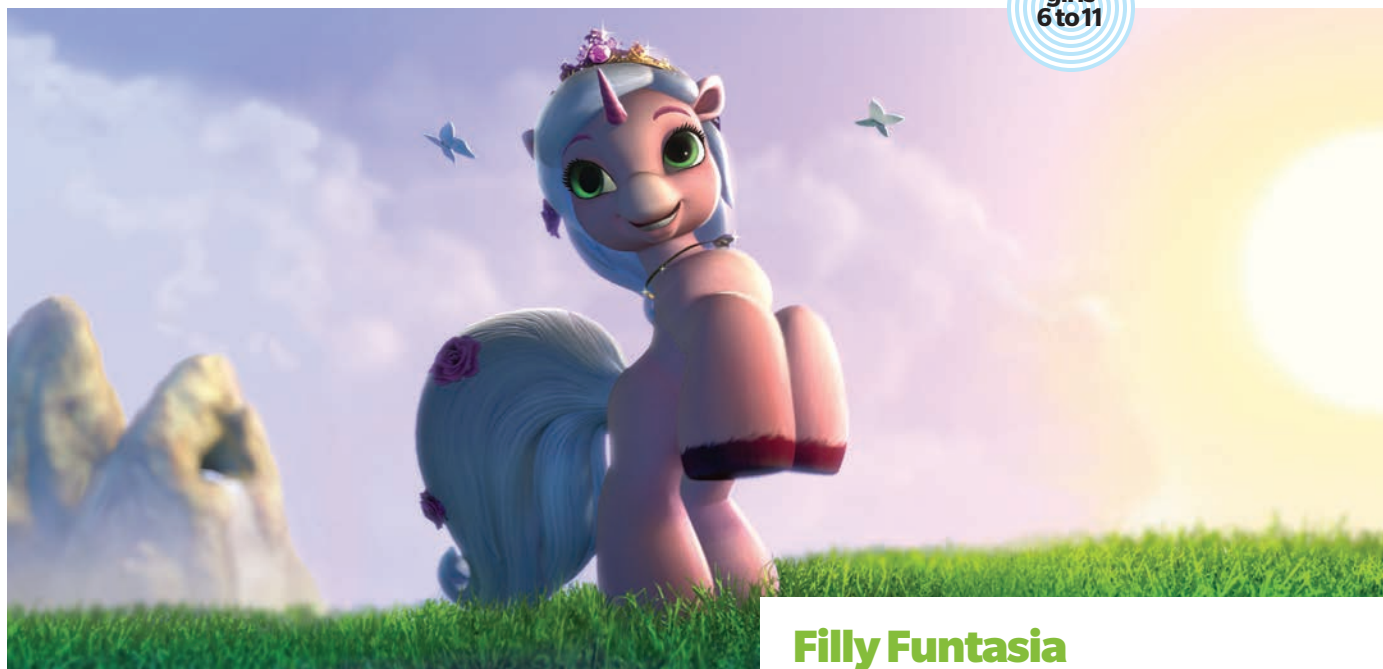
Budget US\$350,000/half hour

Status With Canadian provincial pubcaster TVO on-board, the series has a complete bible and is currently in the scripting process, while Guru and Home Plate seek further presales.

Delivery 2014



Concept This visually unique series was inspired by the work of international experiential art collective Friends With You, which has forged its reputation over the past 10 years by creating large-scale fully interactive installations comprised of huge inflatable structures—otherwise known as bouncy castles to you and me. What co-producers Home Plate and Guru have done is create a story and social-emotional curriculum to showcase these truly fantastical settings that now form Rainbow Kingdom. Adventurous protagonist True and her trusty feline sidekick Bartleby are tasked with using their developing reasoning skills when they're sent on missions by the Rainbow King to help his citizens. And in each ep, True and the King have to determine which three genie-like creatures called Wishes (and their related magical powers) they'll need to help set things right.



Filly Funtasia

Co-producers Dracco (Germany), BRB Internacional/Screen 21 (Spain), Black Dragon (China)

Style CGI

Format 26 x 26 minutes

Budget US\$6.5 million

Status As its global distributor (except Germany), BRB is introducing the series, currently in pre-production, to potential broadcasters and partners at MIPTV.

Delivery 2014

Concept Based on toyco Dracco's bestselling line of Filly girl-skewing mini collectibles—which have sold more than 60 million units worldwide and spawned a consumer products program with more than 40 licensees—the new series places a central cast of five frisky Fillys in a magic academy. Once there, the tiny ponies rely on each other to figure out how to use their powers, often with comedic results. In fact, BRB CEO Carlos Biern says the series is being scripted along the lines of a traditional family-friendly sitcom, packed with plenty of laughs that play off the distinct personalities of the lead Fillys. Not surprisingly, *Filly Funtasia* will be supported by a toy line from master toy licensee Simba, as well as related publishing, apparel and digital media products.

Snow Joe

Co-producers marbledmedia, Big Soul Productions (both Canada)

Style 2D

Format 26 x 11 minutes

Budget US\$250,000 to US\$300,000/half hour

Status With interest expressed by APTN, Canada's Aboriginal peoples net, marbledmedia and Big Soul are actively pitching the series to global broadcasters with scripts and designs currently in development.

Delivery TBD

Concept An idea hatched by Alexander Barr, creator of *Lunar Jim* and *Mike the Knight*, new series *Snow Joe* focuses on the adventures of an Aboriginal/First Nations boy named Joe who lives in Snowflake Peak, a town settled in a mountain valley in Canada's far north. Along with pals Buddy and Nina, Joe embarks on adventures with the help of their "hero gear," which is essentially a costume that helps each character embody the qualities of their spirit animal. Joe, for instance, dons a wolf-like hoodie that makes him feel more brave and helps him in his quest to turn everyday events into epic adventures. Along the way, though, he has to learn what it takes to be a true hero.



We would all love to drive Ferraris, but instead we drive Volkswagens and Hondas. The show still makes me laugh to this day. Calling up the network to say you are shutting down the series sends up some red flags, you could say. As a kid watching those specials, sometimes I would just bawl my eyes out. The Cheesy Salesman is a brick of cheese that peddles our goods.

- Shaftesbury Films CEO **Christina Jennings** on the constant economic pressures faced by showrunners
- **Joe D'Ambrosia**, Disney Junior, describes his love for *I Love Lucy*'s physical comedy
- Indie producer **Tom Lynch** on the reaction to his decision to stop production on *Caitlin's Way* three days into the shoot
- Cartoon Network SVP **Stacy Isenhower** talks about her connection with sentimental Christmas specials
- The Collective's **Kavi Halemane** describes a new Annoying Orange character that will be used for retail promos

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